ELECTRONIC SOUND

THE ELECTRONIC MUSIC MAGAZINE

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PLASTIKMAN + CHILLY GONZALES

UNCHARTED TERRITORY

XPROPAGANDA / PENGUIN CAFE / DAVID M ALLEN / IN THE NURSERY / ROGER ENO / RODNEY CROMWELL

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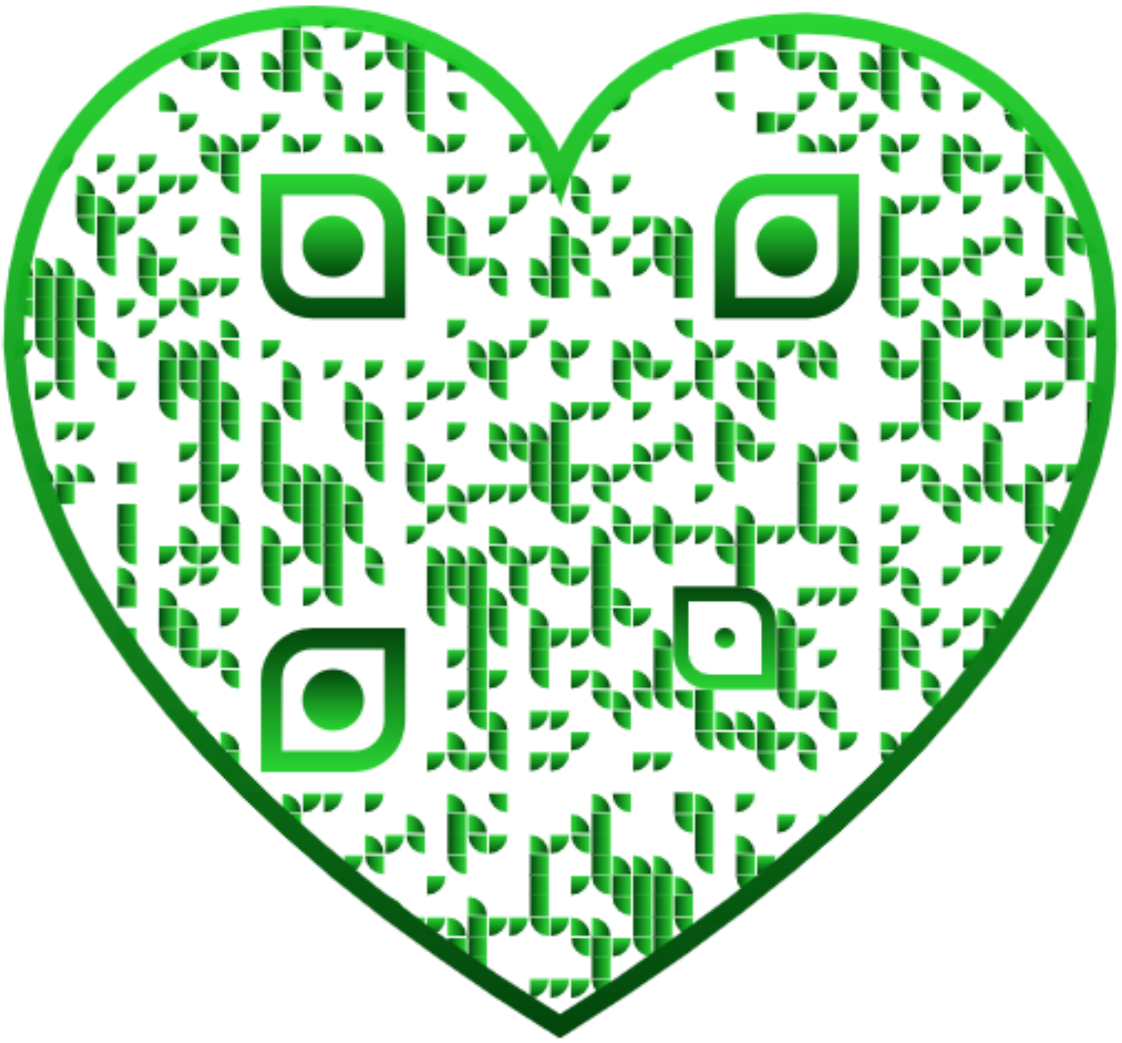

WELCOME TO ELECTRONIC SOUND

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The impact of Richie Hawtin's first releases as Plastikman in the early 1990s was felt across electronic music. There was something audacious, even transgressive, about his 'Sheet One' and 'Musik' albums, plus the 'Recycled Plastik' EP. There were the titles for a start, both of the records and the tracks within – 'Gak', 'Smak', 'Spastik'… This was some kind of dystopik k-hole spelling strategy, like a dyslexik tekno Slade.

The music itself was incredible. It was techno, but not techno. It was acid, but not acid. Everything was so stripped down, especially on the skeletal 'Spastik', it came across as a big "fuck you" to almost everybody else knocking about at the time. It rewired ideas of how electronic music could be made, something Hawtin explored further with his 'Consumed' album in 1998. This was intense and pure, exercises in the granular aesthetics of envelope shaping via analogue circuitry, all watched over by machines of loving grace.

Richie Hawtin's development over the last 30 years has been quite a spectacle. With the onset of the 21st century, he parlayed his role as a pioneer of minimal techno into a colossally successful career as a DJ, becoming an elder statesman of the American EDM explosion and multiplying his following exponentially. His latest release, a radical reinterpretation of 'Consumed' in collaboration with ace pianist Chilly Gonzales, is another fascinating chapter in this sonic adventurer's story – and a great reason for us to put Plastikman and Gonzales on this month's cover.

Hawtin's love of synthesisers was sparked by his encounters with Kraftwerk and Tangerine Dream via his dad's collection of krautrock records. And it was with great sadness that we learned of the death of Klaus Schulze just as we were going to press. Schulze played on the first Tangerine Dream album before forming Ash Ra Tempel with Manuel Göttsching and then launching a solo career of startling productivity. He had recently finished another album, due for release in June, and we interviewed him about it just a week before he died. That encounter will be in our next issue, a small tribute to this giant of machine music.

Before we let you go, we'd like to introduce two new members of the core team here at Electronic Sound – features editor Vel Ilic and artworker Joel Benjamin. Vel will be a familiar name to you – he's been writing for the magazine for a long time – and he's relishing the challenge of curating our features. Joel has a background in illustration and his work has appeared across many of the hip media outlets of the last decade. We're delighted to have them both on board!

Electronically yours,
Push and Mark

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REWIRE FESTIVAL

Amare Concert Hall, The Hague

10 APRIL 2022

WORDS: CLAIRE FRANCIS
PICTURE: PARCIFAL WERKMAN-ZONDAG

It's Friday evening in The Hague and the golden-hour glow is diffusing through the arched windows of the Lutherse Kerk church. On stage, Norwegian saxophonist Bendik Giske cuts a striking lone figure as he works up a hypnotic rhythm with his instrument, fusing free-form jazz and club music in a stunning performance that certainly strikes a spiritual chord. Under the bright stage lights and the watchful gaze of the church's plaster angels, Giske draws on array of beautiful, moving sounds from his mesmeric 2021 album, 'Cracks'. Taking us seamlessly from day to night, he ends his set to passionate applause from a full capacity audience, and Rewire 2022 already feels like a welcome reawakening of the senses.

Taking over The Hague's city centre once again for its 11th edition, this is the first time in three years that Rewire is being staged as a full in-person event. Presenting a three-day programme of cutting edge contemporary music with a strong electronic undercurrent, the festival incorporates more than 150 events in a diverse range of venues, with live concerts, sound installations, talks and film screenings. The Hague, the Netherlands' administrative and royal capital, may seem a slightly staid location for a festival of Rewire's forward-thinking, genre-bending proportions, but the city's intimate and relaxed atmosphere proves the perfect setting for a weekend of music that inspires and invigorates in equal measure.

Alongside Giske's unforgettable solo show, other highlights come in the form of a packed Friday night schedule at club venue Paard, where a slew of British acts (and ES regulars) prove that the UK's current electronic music scene more than holds its own internationally. London-based singer-songwriter Tirzah delights with her sensual, dark-edged avant-pop, while at the other end of the spectrum, a hard-hitting performance from Lancashire rapper/producer/choreographer and Space Afrika collaborator Blackhaine stirs up a sweaty, bouncing crowd. Likewise, a playful and eclectic AV set from London artist and Hyperdub affiliate aya, featuring fellow Londoner Sweatmother, contorts poetry, vocals and experimental reinterpretations of dubstep, grime and drill into a euphoric 50-minute dancefloor workout.

As with any large-scale event these days, a few last-minute line-up adjustments are inevitable. The absence of acts such as The Bug collaborator Dis Fig and Russian/Ukrainian duo Pavel Milyakov and Yana Pavlova is disappointing, but to Rewire's credit the gaps are quickly and ably filled by artists like French producer Aho Ssan, whose textural, distorted soundscapes turn the small basement of The Grey Space In The Middle into an otherworldly club zone. South Korean musician bela later takes the roof off the same venue with their unique and sometimes bone-rattling fusion of traditional Korean folk music and riveting, fast-paced beats.

The next day, Jeremiah Chiu and Marta Sofia Honer offer a soothing Sunday meditation at the Korzo theatre, presenting a glittering live version of their recent ambient album 'Recordings From The Åland Island'. And definitive closing performances don't come any better than the magnificent site-specific work by Italian composer and modular synthesist Caterina Barbieri, who transforms the grand, multi-level Amare concert hall into a maelstrom of thunderous electronics with a vocal choir and a swirling, cosmic light show. As a festival, Rewire pulls in many different musical directions, but all roads lead to the very best of what 2022, and beyond, has to offer.

CATERINA BARBIERI

READER OFFER

Exclusive reader-only limited editions

HOW DO I GET THE ELECTRONIC SOUND READER OFFER?

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B. Take out our Bundle Subscription to get the magazine and the Reader Offer every month for just £10.99. See electronicsound.co.uk/subscribe for details

C. Visit electronicsound.co.uk/plastikman to buy this release on its own for £7.99, but be quick because stocks are strictly limited

Plastikman – ‘Contain (Radio Edit – Original Version)’ / Plastikman & Chilly Gonzales – ‘Contain (In Key) (Radio Edit)’ Clear vinyl seven-inch

This month’s exclusive seven-inch is a transparent vinyl beauty featuring two tracks from Plastikman, one of them a superb new collaboration with Chilly Gonzales

‘CONTAIN (RADIO EDIT – ORIGINAL VERSION)’

The A-side of our seven-inch is an edit of the simultaneously ominous and glorious ‘Contain’, the opening track of ‘Consumed’, Richie Hawtin’s third album as Plastikman. Immediately hailed as a classic when it appeared in 1998, ‘Consumed’ marked a radical departure from the melodic acid of the Canadian producer’s early Plastikman work and was a significant release in the development of minimal techno. Rolling Stone reviewer Will Hermes likened it to Brian Eno’s ‘On Land’ and said it would “make you feel things you’ve never felt before”.

“The interesting thing with the ‘Consumed’ sessions is that the tracks were recorded in sequence,” says Hawtin. “If you hear ‘Artifakts’, the album that came out after ‘Consumed’, you’ll hear bits and pieces that were originally going to be on what was planned as the third Plastikman album. That was what I was working on at the time. It was sounding too melodic, though. I was trying to pull it back, but the 303 kept creeping back in.

“When I finished making ‘Contain’, I knew that I was onto something. I had found what I was actually going to be doing next. And it just started immediately. It clicked and it was flowing. I know how I am when it gets like that. I was like, ‘OK, get into the studio as much as possible, because this could last one week or two weeks, and once it’s gone it may never come back’. What I love about putting this track on the seven-inch is that it’s ‘Consumed’ at the very beginning.”

‘CONTAIN (IN KEY) (RADIO EDIT)’

Flip the disc over for a fantastic update of ‘Contain’ featuring piano supremo Chilly Gonzales. Retitled ‘Contain (In Key)’, this is a whole new track rather than a remix. And just as ‘Contain’ was “the very beginning” of ‘Consumed’, ‘Contain (In Key)’ is the starting point of ‘Consumed In Key’, an exciting and unique collaboration between Hawtin and Gonzales which sees the two artists reworking the Plastikman album in its entirety. In case you missed it, it was Electronic Sound’s lead album review last month.

“When you hear the way I mixed ‘Contain (In Key)’, it’s a bit more playful than some of the later pieces,” says Hawtin. “It’s the first one where I was able to understand how I could bring Chilly’s personality and my personality together and experiment with that. It comes up very lightly and there are more effects, so it’s like Chilly and ‘Consumed’ are meeting, and then they get entwined further and further into the album.”

“I think my first solo piano album – ‘Solo Piano’ from 2004 – was maybe my ‘Consumed’,” notes Gonzales. “I was working on ‘Consumed In Key’ for a while before Richie even knew about it. Most of my early ideas, where I was reacting to ‘Consumed’ in the moment, were keepers, but then there was also that deeper listening, as I was attempting to really get under the hood of it. The amount of learning that happened over the course of this process was much higher than with many of my other collaborations.”

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THE ITALIAN JOB

Iconic system receives a stunning redesign

Over the last 77 years, designers at Brionvega have raised the bar in home audio again and again. Now the Italian company are revising a few models from their portfolio, the latest being this striking Radiofonografo RR226 FO-ST – try saying that with a toffee in your mouth.

Designed in 1965 by brothers Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, this all-in-one system has been reimagined to accommodate the modern listener, with aptX HD Bluetooth capabilities and a new Project turntable. It's also modular, so the speakers can be positioned horizontally or vertically, depending on preference. Pretty stunning it is too, as reflected in the price – it'll set you back around £14,000, with only 100 being made. You'd best get to it then. **brionvega.it**

PULSE

CARMEL SMICKERSGILL

Composer turns experimental dabbler

WHO THEY?

Simultaneously tapping into the worlds of theatre music and indie electronica is Carmel Smickersgill. Since leaving the Royal Northern College of Music in 2018, Smickersgill has set up shop in Manchester where she has written compositions for plays and concert halls, fielding commissions from the Liverpool Philharmonic's Ensemble 10/10 and BBC Radio 3. She's even been nominated for the Ivor Novello Rising Star Award in the process. All this takes place alongside work with experimental acts like Bunny Hoova, who feature on 'Curl Compilation 2' released last year by Mica Levi's CURL collective.

WHY CARMEL SMICKERSGILL?

Smickersgill's own solo work operates in the instrumental-experimental-pop realm, flitting between the kitsch colours of a William Onyeabor, the tripped-out leering of 'Windowlicker'-era Aphex Twin, and the cool locomotion of Bonobo. Mentored and championed by Anna Meredith, Smickersgill applies a welcome academic-creative slant to her amorphous genre, by combining a keen awareness of sound design, sampling and beat-making with brilliant skill in traditional approaches to composition. Her latest single 'Leaving' is a precocious fusion of flute sounds, vocals, synths and dancehall-inspired percussion. It's the standout from her debut EP, 'We Get What We Get & We Don't Get Upset', with tracks 'Questioning' and 'Greeting' demonstrating staccato sequences of vocal samples and warm synthscapes.

TELL US MORE...

In 2017, New Order and Liam Gillick played live at the Manchester International Festival. If you look carefully at 'New Order: Decades', the documentary chronicling the acclaimed collaboration, you can just make out Smickersgill in the synthesiser orchestra.

WILLIAM STOKES

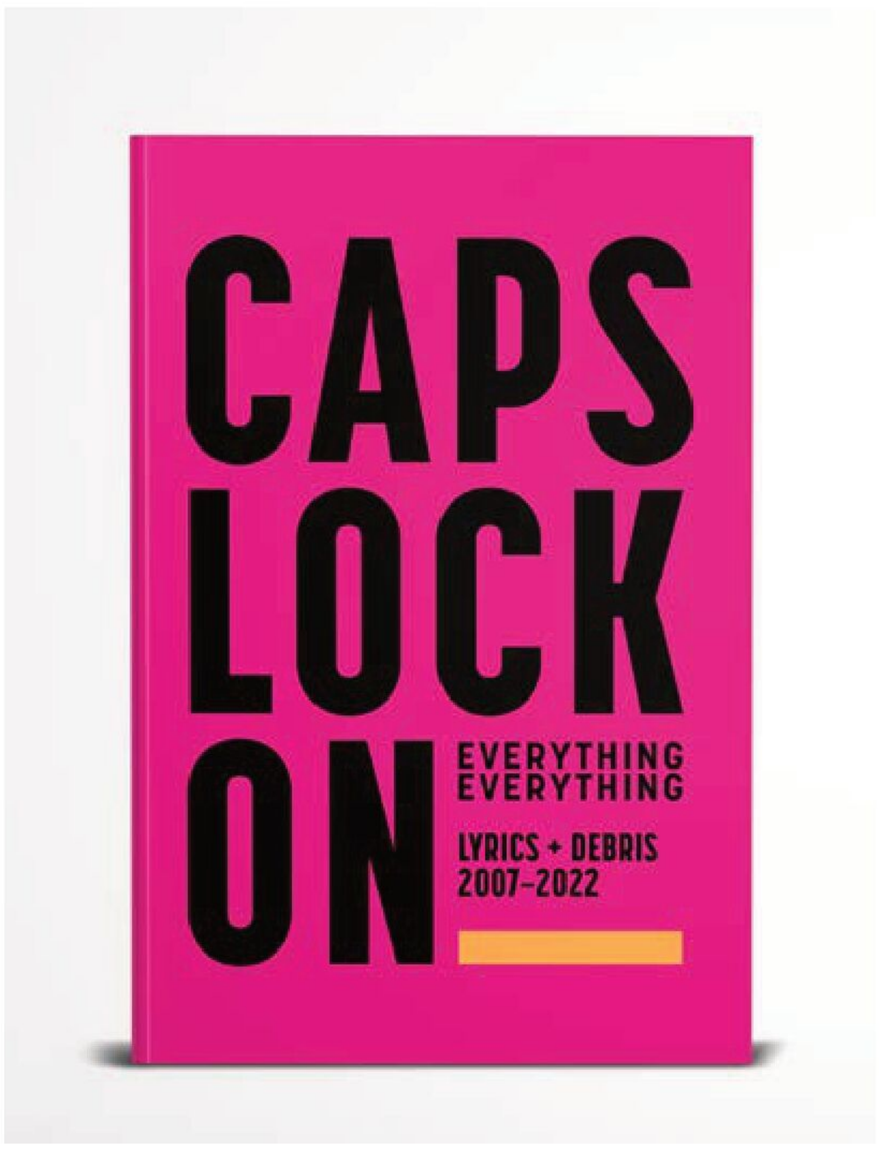
'We Get What We Get & We Don't Get Upset' is out now on PRAH

DATA WITH DESTINY

Everything Everything's doorstopper

This month, Manchester art-popsters Everything Everything release a career-spanning book to accompany their new AI-inspired album, 'Raw Data Feel'. Published by Faber Music, 'CAPS LOCK ON: Lyrics + Debris 2007-2022' is a full-colour hardback stuffed with lyrics, artwork, archive photos, set-lists and more, detailing the group's remarkable 15-year history.

The band also employed an innovative composition process for 'Raw Data Feel' that saw frontman Jonathan Higgs creating his own AI programme and feeding it all manner of information – LinkedIn terms and conditions, the epic poem, 'Beowulf', 400,000 4Chan posts and the teachings of Confucius – before using the programme's responses as the basis for the album's lyrics, song titles and artwork. Intrigued? You should be. For more, head over to **everything-everything.co.uk**



GAME CHANGER

Turn your old NES console into a synth

Now's the time to breathe new life into that Nintendo Entertainment System that's probably collecting dust in your attic. Created by app developer Avicr, SynthNes is a free ROM that transforms your old NES console into a fully functioning synthesiser, allowing you to take control of the NES's five audio channels with a MIDI controller of your choice. It's expandable too, so you can connect multiple consoles to create an NES orchestra, and it includes presets, automation, animated sprite graphics and several "hidden surprises". SynthNes comes with a complete PDF manual explaining how to set it up, and if you invested in one of Analogue's NES revivals, the Nt Mini, it will also work with that. Avicr have also made it "name your own price", so it's accessible for everyone. It's always good to support open-source innovators. **avicr.itch.io/synthnes**

NEEDS MUST

Freewheeling through time and space, **Kris Needs** continues his adventures in sound. This month: Red Planet

The passing Red Planet reference in last month's Underground Resistance tribute led to me digging out my treasured and well-worn complete set. This didn't require much vinyl excavation as those red covers have accompanied my every move since they started looming in FatCat Records 30 years ago.

In my humble opinion, Red Planet is one of the finest bodies of work in techno. On my last count, 14 of these mysterious EPs had been released between 1992's 'Meet The Red Planet' and 2010's 'Techno Symphonic In G'. In the course of their creation, they descended from Martian polar caps to an arcane spirituality, addressing Native American suppression or the invincible spirit of a besieged but never unbroken Motor City.

Prime UR with a soulful, shimmering edge, the booting grooves could pinball between electro and space techno, lathered in ethereal string stabs, lush rising pads and starbursts of cathartic electronic emotion on titles including 'Sex In Zero Gravity', 'Journey To The Martian Polar Cap' and ever-lethal trouser-demolisher 'Star Dancer', which I deployed in destroying Liverpool's mighty Voodoo as the new year of 1994 came in (it was simply a weapon of mass destruction in the hands of Mr Weatherall).

Adding to the label's mystique, the question still remains – who done 'em? These extraordinary electronic beauties were always credited to The Martian, with help along the way from Drexciya, Octave One and, in the case of RP 14, Galaxy 2 Galaxy. Of course, it had to be "Mad" Mike Banks, the unshakable force behind UR, yet he's always denied it (and, somewhat confusingly, Discogs credits some bloke called Will Thomas as producer).

All Mike's hallmarks are there, glimmering like a space hippo's testicles, from his voice as Astral Apache on 1994's 'Wardance' from 'The Long Winter Of Mars' set to 1997's 'The Voice Of Grandmother'. Knowing the man as I did, this is pure Mad Mike, paying tribute to his blood lineage with supernatural sensitivity.

'The Last Stand' has it all – relentless Motor City funk attack (that double hi-hat slash every eight bars a crucial additive) and gorgeously melancholic strings that transform the track into a pulsating space hymn, like a Detroit ruin glowing with transcendent defiance. Trawling through these tunes once more this weekend reaffirmed Red Planet as the gold standard for hi-tech soul in electronic music as they slaughtered my mate's garden party.

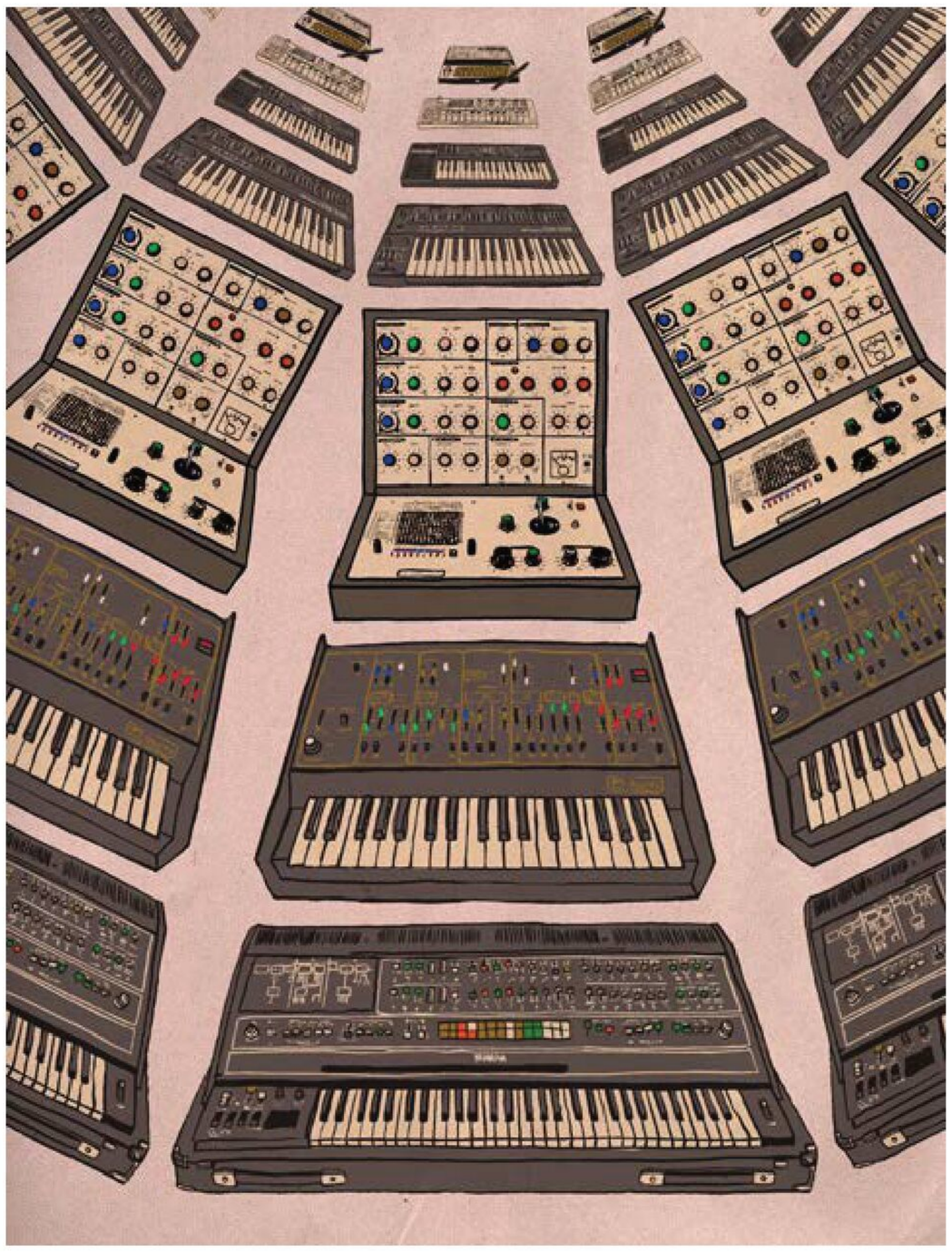
PICTURE THIS

Hardware-inspired sketches and merch

Analog Prints is a merch shop run by Detroit-based illustrator Scott Iulianelli, who produces electronic-related designs fit for framing. With a detailed, hand-drawn style and the occasional surrealist slant, you can expect renditions of iconic hardware that ends up on posters, T-shirts and even shoes.

"I think the art brings the beauty of the gear into a different dimension and holds the viewer's attention longer than a photograph, for some reason," says Iulianelli, "but I'm not sure why."

Iulianelli's work has found supporters across the music production world, welcoming commissions from Universal Audio, Earthquaker Devices, Eventide and more. **analogprints.net**



ICH BIN EIN BERLINER

The city tour better than any Rough Guide

'Coming To Berlin' is the tremendous debut book from writer, podcaster and DJ Paul Hanford, who made the city his home in 2018. Subtitled 'Global Journeys Into An Electronic Music And Club Culture Capital', it's "a book about my version of Berlin", explains Hanford. After initially battling with imposter syndrome – "Why the fuck should I, a newcomer, an Ausländer, get to write about someone else's culture?" – it dawned on Hanford that so many creative people living in Berlin were also newcomers at one point too.

As well as Hanford's own musings, each chapter is a novelistic encounter with the DJs, producers, musicians, historians, promoters and activists of the city. Interviewees include Mark Reeder, the former Factory Records associate who came to West Berlin – "a walled-in, broken city that nobody has a good word to say about" – in 1979 to buy some records, and never left. Elsewhere, we hear about New Zealand-born DJ Fuckoff, ambient artist Joseph Kamaru (aka KMRU from Nairobi) and Planet Mu affiliate, Ziúr. All provide fascinating observations on music, their experiences of living in the city, life during lockdown and the growing unease at Berlin's creeping gentrification. Get it now for £11.99. **velocitypress.uk**

COVER STORY

Black Midi release EP of surprising renditions

Mercury Prize-nominated Brit School alumni Black Midi are without doubt one of the most eccentric bands the UK has produced in recent years. Their fondness for ultra-complex jams is redolent of 1970s prog rock at its most knotty and wilful, along with laid-back jazz, thrash metal and West African highlife. So it's no surprise that their recent EP of covers, 'Cavalcovers' – which takes its name from the band's second album, last year's critically acclaimed 'Cavalcade' – features some truly diverse source material.

As well as King Crimson's '21st Century Schizoid Man' and Captain Beefheart's 'Moonlight On Vermont', the London group have even tackled Taylor Swift's 'Love Story' with a notably faithful version that sounds like epic stadium rock a la Springsteen, complete with euphoric sax solos. A digital-only release, 'Cavalcovers' is available to stream in all the usual places, or you can download it for £2.75. **bmblackmidi.bandcamp.com**

ZEN AND INK

Exploring John Cage's inventive practice

The influence of Zen Buddhism on John Cage is the subject of a new short book titled 'John Cage: Art, Life & Zen', exploring how the experimental composer's spirituality came to guide his creative life. As well as including Cage's own writings and artwork on the subject, the 64-page book features contributions from Laurie Anderson, poets J Mae Barizo and Richard Chess, and author Kay Larson.

Published by Atelier Éditions, who also revealed Cage's fascination with mushrooms in the essential 'John Cage: A Mycological Foray', you can expect the same in-depth analysis here. The first volume in Atelier's 'Faith In Arts' series, which looks at how spiritualism and art overlap, it's available to order now for $12. **atelier-editions.com**

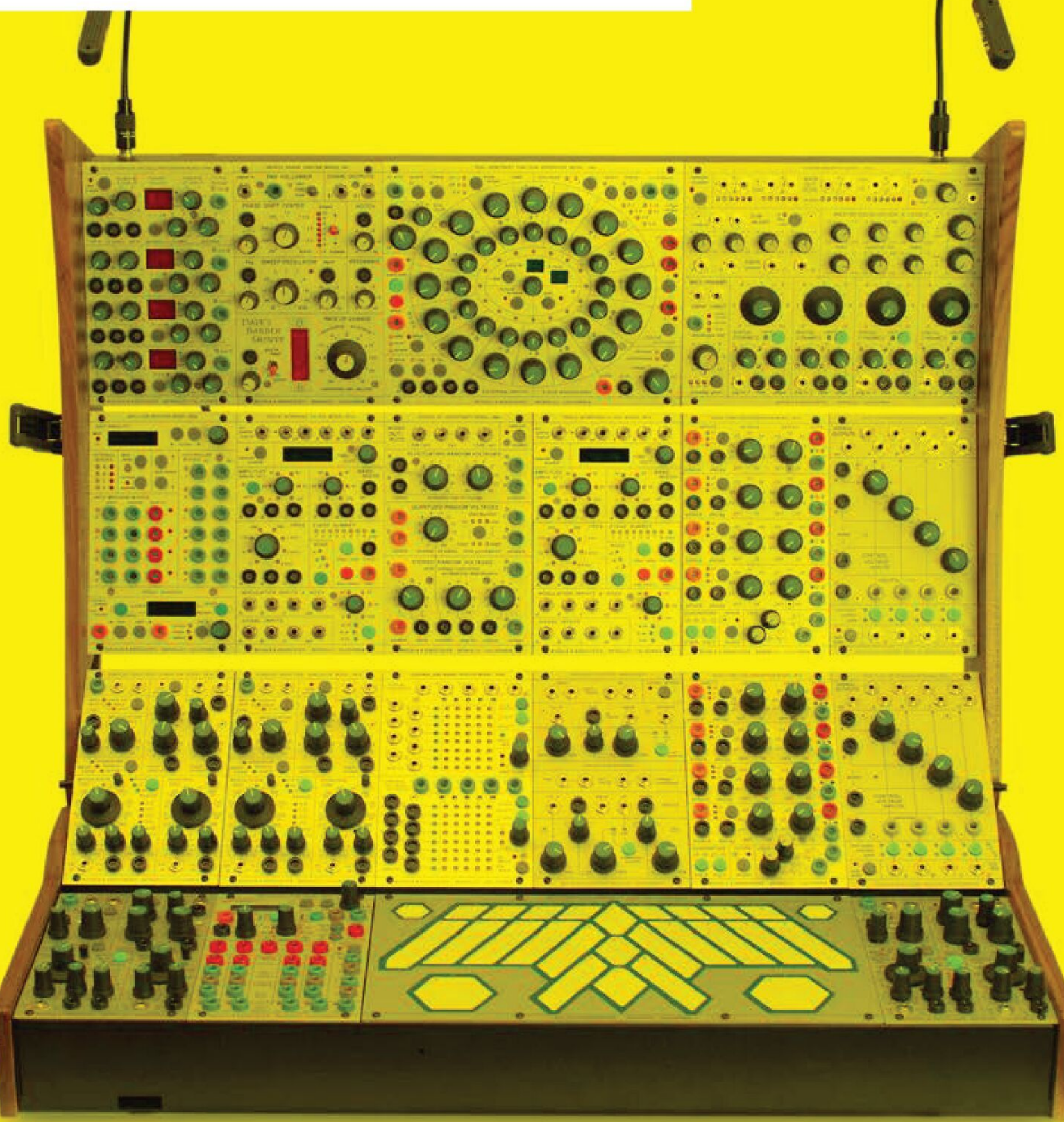
BUILD A BUCHLA

Online tool helps you design your dream modular synth

Getting into Buchla synths can be a daunting prospect. So the new Buchla Instrument Designer is a welcome online resource, providing a simple step-by-step process that lets you construct a synth bit by bit, according to your needs.

First, select either a preconfigured system to customise, ranging from the smaller System 4 to the immense System 24, or an empty cabinet to fill with modules. Then, all you need to do is save the build, hand over your hard-earned cash, and the company will send your dream machine to you. Simple.

"Our intention," explains app designer Adam Clark, "was to create a very visual, interactive and intuitive tool for our customers to conceptualise their Buchla instrument. Users can quickly experiment with new layouts and tools that allow them to share with others." **buchla.com**



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DAY SPLITS REVEALED

FRIDAY 22

GROOVE ARMADA · SPIRITUALIZED
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BCUC · LOS BITCHOS · TIM BURGESS · JANE WEAVER · SOFIA KOURTESIS
THE GOA EXPRESS · MANARA · SAD NIGHT DYNAMITE · KATY J PEARSON
NABIHAH IQBAL & LIBBY HEANEY · SECRET NIGHT GANG · GOYA GUMBANI
NUHA RUBY RA · MANDY, INDIANA · NOSO · LYR · LOLLY ADEFOPE
A PROBLEM SQUARED · ANDREW O'NEILL · MATTHEW WINNING
GARRETT MILLERICK PLUS **THE VIP VILLAGE HOSTED BY DISTRICT**

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MOGWAI · METRONOMY · TIM PEAKE
SQUAREPUSHER · WORKING MENS CLUB · BRAINIAC LIVE
YARD ACT · PORRIDGE RADIO · LONELADY · ALEWYA · INDIA JORDAN
LANTERNS ON THE LAKE · A GUY CALLED GERALD · PLANNINGTOROCK
MR WILSON'S SECOND LINERS PRESENT LEFTISM · KORELESS · MEWN
ETHAN P FLYNN · FACESOUL · JOY ANONYMOUS · GRETEL HÄNLYN
STEWART LEE PRESENTS KING ROCKER · ADAM BUXTON: BUG · ROB ROUSE
DAVID OLUSOGA IN CONVERSATION WITH JON SAVAGE · MONICA GRADY
BIG FISH LITTLE FISH PLUS **THE VIP VILLAGE HOSTED BY HAWKSMOOR**

SUNDAY 24

BJÖRK WITH THE **HALLÉ ORCHESTRA**
ANNA MEREDITH · OUMOU SANGARÉ · WARMDUSCHER · HAAI
JIM AL–KHALILI · MARY ANNE HOBBS · HENGE · PONGO · A CERTAIN RATIO
ORLANDO WEEKS · JOCKSTRAP · LIDO PIMIENTA · KEELEY FORSYTH
STEALING SHEEP & RADIOPHONIC WORKSHOP · W.H LUNG · THE BUG CLUB
MARK RADCLIFFE'S UNE · PEANESS · FEARS · MORGAN HARPER JONES
THE ECCENTRONIC RESEARCH COUNCIL FEAT. MAXINE PEAKE
DESIREE BURCH · AHIR SHAH · KIRI PRITCHARD–MCLEAN · OLGA KOCH
ROUGH TRADE BOOKS WITH MUSA OKWONGA, ROY AND MORE
PLUS **THE VIP VILLAGE HOSTED BY WHERE THE LIGHT GETS IN**

THURSDAY OPENING CONCERT
HANNAH PEEL AND **PARAORCHESTRA: THE UNFOLDING**
KATHLEEN FRANCES PLUS VIP HOSTED BY RACHEL STOCKLEY

ACROSS THE WEEKEND
THE SPACE SHED · LUMINARIUM · TIM'S TWITTER LISTENING PARTIES
BRITISH ANTARCTIC SURVEY · CHESTER ZOO · TWILIGHT PARADES
ACTUAL REALITY ARCADE · JEDI LIGHTSABER CLASSES · STARGAZING
POP–UP PUPPET CINEMA · THE BLUEDOT PODCAST AND MUCH MORE!

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ROBOT BLOCK

Help Daft Punk get the LEGO treatment

Do you like LEGO? Do you want LEGO sets of Daft Punk's iconic helmets? Of course you do! This set was designed by mega DP fan Eliot O'Brien, and submitted as part of the LEGO Ideas initiative, inviting fans to design ideas for possible products, which then become eligible for production if they garner enough support. Previous Ideas sets include a Fender Stratocaster, the 'Seinfeld' apartment and the International Space Station, but this is the best we've seen so far. At the time of writing, the Daft Punk helmets have 6,049 supporters. There's still plenty of time to pledge your support and get these beauties one step closer to being made. **ideas.lego.com**

EVERY SECOND COUNTS

All ears for Heardle

No doubt you will be familiar with Wordle, the browser game on everyone's lips and fingertips. For those still in the dark, the premise is simple – each day you have to guess a new five letter word in six goes, with the aid of a colour-coded key to indicate how close you are. After Wordle's popularity skyrocketed earlier this year, countless other spin-offs appeared, yet it was Heardle that pricked up our ears – literally. Each day, a new song is posted that you have to guess in six attempts. You can reveal snippets of the song in segments to make things easier, but getting it in one go will give you a real buzz. No cheating with Shazam, mind. **heardle.app**

UNDER THE INFLUENCE

Ambient composer **Roger Eno,** who has recently released a new album, 'The Turning Year', talks about cultural awakenings, blissful pottering and the beauty of stillness

INTERVIEW: MAT SMITH

A CHANCE MEETING

"I failed the 11+. That meant going to a school for people who lifted heavy things – basically a blue-collar place. I was in tears. My dad and I went to a comprehensive school for a visit. In the music room, there was a cornet on the table. I picked it up and instantly knew I was going to be a musician.

"When it came to finishing secondary school, I was in a quandary about what to do. There was a geography teacher who happened to be a tuba player and he said, 'Well, have you thought about going to music college?'. No one had mentioned that in all the time I'd been at the school.

"At college, the world opened up for me because I discovered literature, poetry and art. I met people who thought about interesting stuff. It was purely due to an accidental conversation in a corridor. Without that, my life would have been completely different."

GOIN' TO THE CHAPEL

"I try to leave where I live as little as possible – I'm completely at home here. The area is full of hundreds of remote medieval churches. You've got wall paintings dating from the 14th century and all these fragments of history. The Reformation whitewashed over all of them, but there are parts where the whitewash has come off and it's not been restored, so there's a ghost of the past in these places. You can turn up at St. Ethelbert's and just go in and ring their three handbells. It's as close to the Middle Ages as you can get. This is a huge influence on my work.

"It's the concept of becoming isolated 'in a place where prayer was once valid' – to use TS Eliot's phrase – it's almost like something beautiful is in those walls. Much of the time I'm either on my own or with my dog. We can be there in stillness. The idea of stillness is getting somewhere where you can be comfortable with yourself. You can close down for a bit and not have your thoughts guided. They can just ramble on."

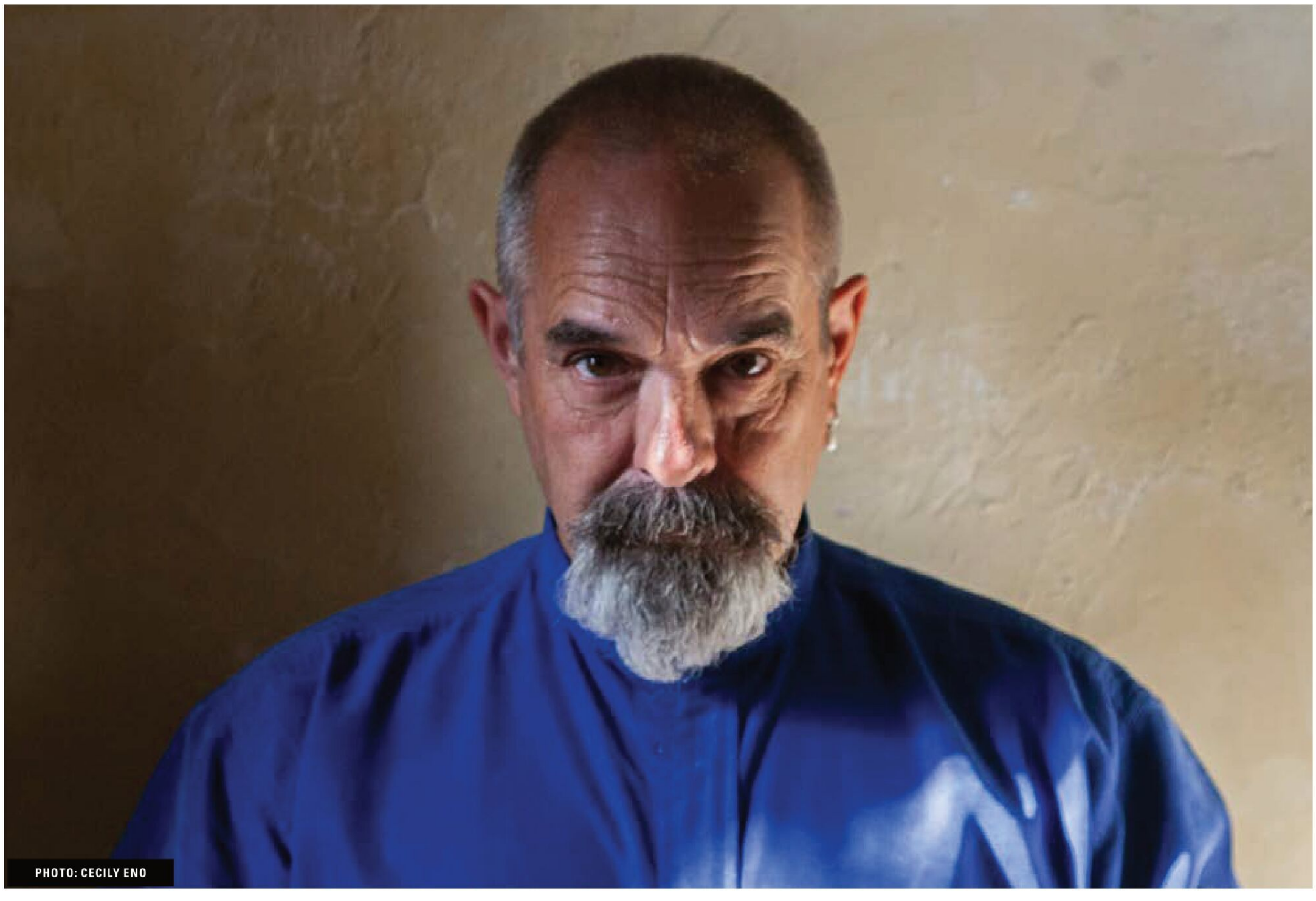


PHOTO: CECILY ENO

ON TWO WHEELS

"I ride a Kawasaki W650 motorcycle. I didn't buy it for speed – I had a Yamaha 600 that went faster, but I didn't like the sound of the engine. The Kawasaki's just got a really comfortable sound, and is a delight for the area that I live in, right on the border of Suffolk and Norfolk. There are lots of hardly used roads and narrow lanes nearby. I putter around looking at primroses growing with this nice little noise under me.

"I also love cycling really slowly in the countryside. When you cycle, you can just look over the fields and be in the place with no motor noise whatsoever. I hate rushing around. I'll often take our Bearded Collie Ted out for a run beside me. I live a sort of blissful existence, and I want elements of that to transmit to other people through my music."

SATURNINE LIVES

"One of my favourite books is 'The Rings Of Saturn' by WG Sebald, from 1995. I re-read it every summer. It's about a walk that Sebald took in the area I live in, so I know all the places he visits. He got a train from Norwich to Lowestoft and started walking inland from the coast.

"At its heart, the book is all about death, transience and decay, and how pointless it is imagining that whatever you're doing now will have any effect in the long term. It's human arrogance making us think we might have any real impact on a serious future. I'm constantly thinking about passing time, realising that I can do nothing."

STAYING ON POINT

"I like the form of poetry, where you have to keep everything succinct. If you try to describe something, you've really got to get it right, because it isn't a novel. Cutting down on your weaponry, in order to target things properly, is a notion that intrigues me and one that I constantly use in my music.

"Most of my compositions start from improvisation, and then I'll realise there are a load of unnecessary notes. A lot of my work is really subtracting rather than adding into it, to the level where I call myself a 'decomposer'. I think that might go on my gravestone."

EASTERN PHILOSOPHY

"At some point in my life, I began to get interested in Eastern thought, in particular one part of Japanese philosophy, which basically says that emptiness is a thing in itself. If you draw a circle on a piece of paper, Western eyes will instantly see the ring that makes the circle, whereas Eastern cultures are much more likely to see the void than the line that delineates it.

"There's also the beautiful Japanese concept of kintsugi. If you drop a china pot, you don't throw it away, you repair it with gold to show where it has been broken. So, you make the break a feature and beautify the fact that this object has changed. I think that's a really remarkable way of looking at things."

MIND THE GAP

"In a lot of my music, hardly anything happens. You can view that either as being open or as being vacuous. The person's opinion is critical to how that piece appears to them. Not all of the information is given – there's a lot less there to help the listener decide what it's actually about.

"Hence, I leave space and use it as a compositional tool. Space has a specific timbre – there's this big gap with nothing happening. The listener has to think, 'How do I feel about this? What does it mean?', and that's when they take over and have a say in what the composition is."

'The Turning Year' is out now on Deutsche Grammophon

ISLAND LIFE

Drawing on field recordings, natural history books, family tales and more, **Arun Sood** finds a new language to explore his past in 'Searching Erskine'

WORDS: ISAAK LEWIS-SMITH

"Around 2011, my family stayed in a cottage overlooking the Vallay Strand," remembers Arun Sood. "My uncle and I played a lot of folk songs together, and we swapped stories about my grandmother's life on the tidal island. There was lots of whisky. Melancholy hangovers, sublime sunsets, silhouettes of ruins. It was all very romantic, but also foreboding. There was constant sound – lapping tides, rattling wind, birdsong, our song. Thinking back, it was probably the early days of me trying to capture sounds in place, and place in sounds."

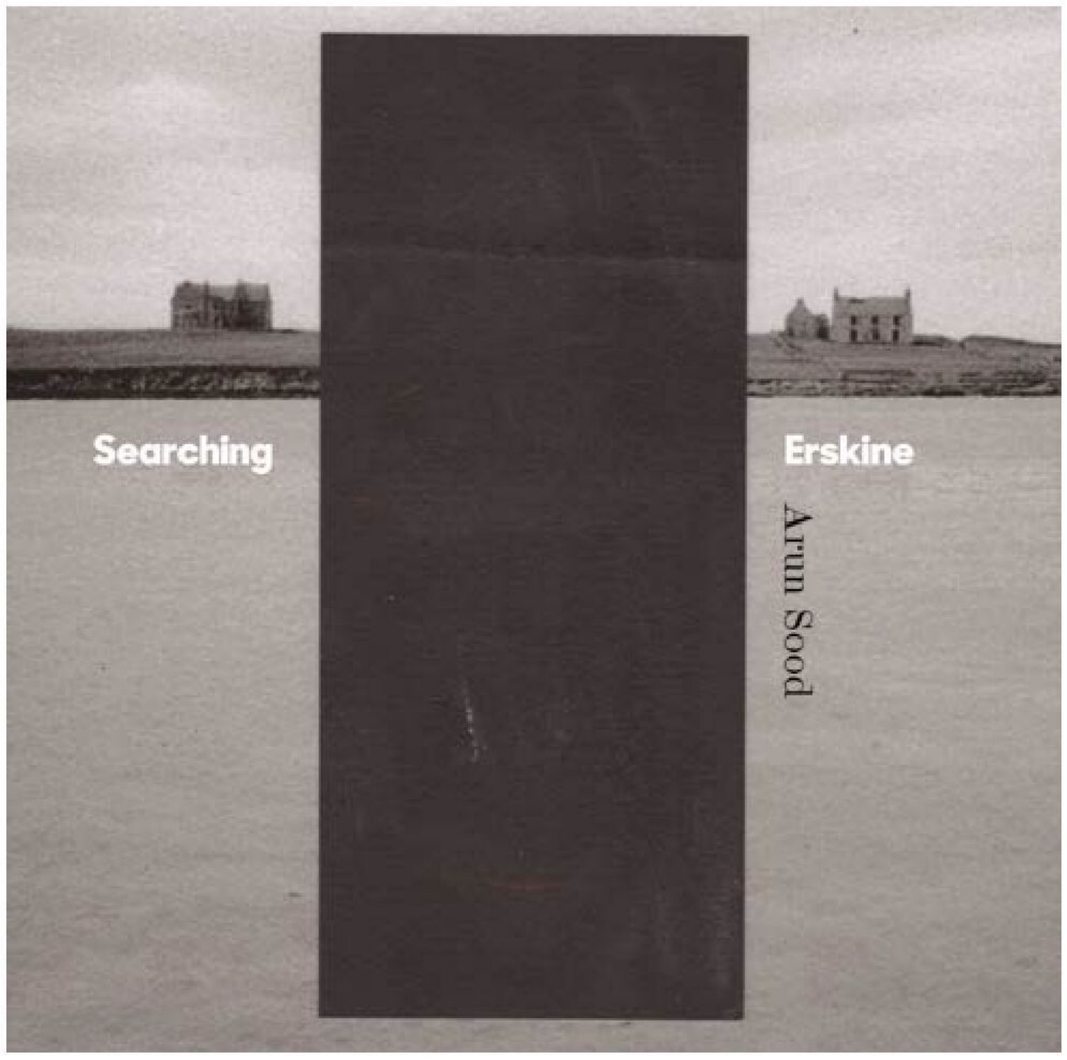
Sood, a Scottish-Indian writer and musician, is recounting the family holiday which gave him the idea to make an album about Vallay – a 2km² tidal island in the Outer Hebrides. Over a decade later, that album is now being issued on Edinburgh's evergreen Blackford Hill label, with a 64-page book accompanying the digital release. Titled 'Searching Erskine', together they form a startlingly intimate record of his ancestral past on Vallay.

His family's connections with Vallay go back to the 1750s, though the majority of 'Searching Erskine' focuses on events that took place after 1902, when an eccentric textile manufacturer turned archaeologist called Erskine Beveridge moved there. Beveridge's ambition was to make Vallay his base for the archaeological expeditions he conducted throughout the Outer Hebrides – something that was easier said than done. Since Vallay is a tidal island, it's only accessible by foot for two hours a day at low tide, forcing Beveridge to transport everything – the beams and bricks for his new mansion, even the soil for his garden – by steamboat, which then had to be transferred to a horse and cart at shore for the final slog. All in all, the relocation would take three years to complete.

Sood's great-great-grandfather, John MacDonald, was among those who helped Beveridge move. It's his grainy black-and-white portrait which adorns the first page of 'Searching Erskine'. In the introduction, Sood comments on his own physical resemblance to the man – "his burrowed dark brow and angular bone structure" – but a nagging dissatisfaction lingered whenever Sood looked at the photo. Something seemed to be missing.

"The extent to which he inhabits my breath, sound, being and way of seeing," he writes, "is met with a silence, which I have always been curious and intrigued by."

Sood is a lecturer in English Literature at the University of Plymouth.



But he found that in order to cure the silence, sound would need to be his primary method of approaching his past, so began drawing up plans to create a new artefact about life on Vallay using original music, poetry, field recordings and "spectral yawps".

In making 'Searching Erskine', Sood camped for days on the now-uninhabited Vallay, pitching his tent among the fossils of family myths he had listened to so many times while growing up – the dilapidated Taigh Mor mansion where Beveridge lived, the adjacent farmhouse which his family members called home. He even discovered black smudges where firepits had been lit decades earlier. It was all there to see, though fading. Yet Sood mused on how "the geese, the gull shrieks, the grassy whispers" were the same noises his grandmother – Beveridge's housekeeper – would have heard when lighting the mansion's stove each morning.

"Over time, it became more about me trying to process the allure in the right way," explains Sood, "conscious as I was of over-romanticising the Outer Hebrides, which can be problematic in so many ways. The music, writing and art became a way for me to situate myself in a place that I was simultaneously connected to and also far removed from. There is an aspect of liminality to it all."

At times, 'Searching Erskine' can sound so personal it feels like an invasion of privacy. Across its 12 tracks, you hear recordings of Sood's own family having dinner, clinking cutlery sounding like porcelain-delicate melodies, while family myths are retold and woven into the music. On 'The Cairn', someone who once lived on the island describes the morning they found the body of Beveridge's son floating in the sea water, having been caught out while crossing the sand flats to the mainland.

Sood says he borrowed ideas from German literary scholar Helmut Kaffenberger, who analysed the role of sound in Walter Benjamin's writing, where banal, quotidian noises such as clinking, buzzing or droning act as "acoustics of profane illumination".

Though Sood was instead attending to the squelch of sand or flapping of birds, the driving idea is much the same – that sound can "inaugurate dream-like experiences which impart previously unforeseen knowledge or traces of the past". And through the process of making 'Searching Erskine', it's these traces of the past that Sood hopes to have scattered himself.

"I've often thought of Vallay as a place of many layers – culturally, geologically, temporally," he says. "I think I may have sprinkled a layer on top of the island's palimpsest. In this way, I hope to have found something, or left something for others to find."

The 'Searching Erskine' digital album and accompanying book are out now on Blackford Hill. The vinyl album follows shortly

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DOWN TO EARTH

How do you make music from shifting tectonic plates? We ask **Stuart Hyatt**, whose latest Field Works album redefines the meaning of rock music

WORDS: ANTON SPICE

Back in the spring of 2020, scientists around the world detected an unusual decline in seismic activity. Nothing shakes up a seismologist like a good vibration – or lack thereof – and a paper published several months later concluded that this was "the longest and most coherent global seismic noise reduction in recorded history". Thanks to lockdown, the great quieting had occurred. Their conclusion? Humans make Earth rumble, and when we stop, it does too.

"We talk about the streets that were empty, that there were no planes in the sky," says US-based musician and Field Works founder Stuart Hyatt. "But my question was – what did the Earth actually sound like?"

This is the subject of 'Stations', the 10th album in the Field Works series, which sees Hyatt collaborate with musicians and scientists to explore our sonic relationship with the natural environment. The previous nine albums have investigated everything from the echolocations of endangered bats to the acoustic resonance of a Texan cave.

"The whole Field Works experiment is about listening as a way of understanding, as a way of honouring, as a way of respecting, and ultimately protecting things that we feel are important," Hyatt explains. Dressed in a twin-pocketed brown shirt, he looks as much a geologist as he does an electronic musician. Self-taught in both, it's a tension which has so far been central to his practice.

"I feel like I missed out on being a scientist," he admits, recounting an education that instead saw him train as a sculptor and architect. In fact, the first Field Works record, 2018's 'Pogue's Run', doubled as Hyatt's master's thesis. Years later, he quips that he is yet to design a building.

"The reason I called this project Field Works is that I liken it to the way a scientist goes into the field, gathers their data and brings it back to the lab to analyse," he says. "That's what I do with sound."

On 'Stations', this "data" takes the form of various clicks, whirrs and crackles extracted from 10 monitoring stations in Alaska that Hyatt affectionately calls his "giant Arctic recording studio". Using a custom MATLAB programming script, seismologist Debi Kilb then transposed the low-level frequencies into sonic material for the album's percussive crust. All the while, I am resisting the urge to make a joke about rock music.

"It's not unlike a big drum kit," Hyatt enthuses. "Each individual 'clack' is not that interesting. It's about how they're all put together."

Hyatt then had to assemble the humans, bringing in Janie Cowan (bass), Masayoshi Fujita (vibraphone), Qasim Naqvi (modular synth) and Brad Weber (beats, percussion) to create the swirling ambient foundations of the album.

"The whole idea was to have a human singalong with the Earth. It's a corny proposition, but once you get over that, I think it's a really beautiful one."

On nine of the 10 tracks, this terrestrial duet is sung by American vocalist Hanna Benn. For the 10th, however, Hyatt called on another seasoned spirit guide.

"The human body and the Earth were experiencing this quieting in the same way, so who better to sing to this than Laraaji?" One email later and Hyatt was already unpacking a bundle of "oohs" and "aahs" from the renowned new ager, as well as recordings of his own laughter.

"I had no intention of using it," Hyatt says, "but despite the terror of the last two years, there is a certain absurdity to it all."

That 'Stations' concludes with the sound of Laraaji's maniacal guffaws seems somehow fitting, yet it is only when Hyatt tells me how moved he was by Pink Floyd as a child that a comparison with the final moments of 'The Dark Side Of The Moon' begins to surface.

In their ambition, the Field Works projects are concept albums in the grand tradition, and for Hyatt, the connection lies in the sense of awe he experiences from both art and science.

"The scientists I talk to have that feeling, even with the nerdiest granular data point," he explains. "It's very similar to the idea of a religious experience, of the transcendent, of the supernatural. All of those things are what I look for in art too."

The 'Stations' album is accompanied by a book that does not shy away from the science, as well as an exhibition at The Anchorage Museum, Alaska, where the project was first conceived. Each track has also been remixed, or "peer reviewed" as the liner notes put it, by musicians including Alva Noto, Afrodeutsche and Penelope Trappes.

Now the project is out in the world for real, is Hyatt any closer to understanding what Earth sounds like?

"The Earth, for better or for worse, includes us, our instruments and our voices," he says. "With each project I'm trying to get a little deeper."

Hyatt's response probably deserves an ellipsis at the end of it. It is therefore no surprise to hear that Field Works 11 is already in motion.

"It's all systems go," he smiles, declining an invitation to elaborate. "All I can tell you is I am reading a lot about bioelectricity."

'Stations' is out now on Temporary Residence Ltd

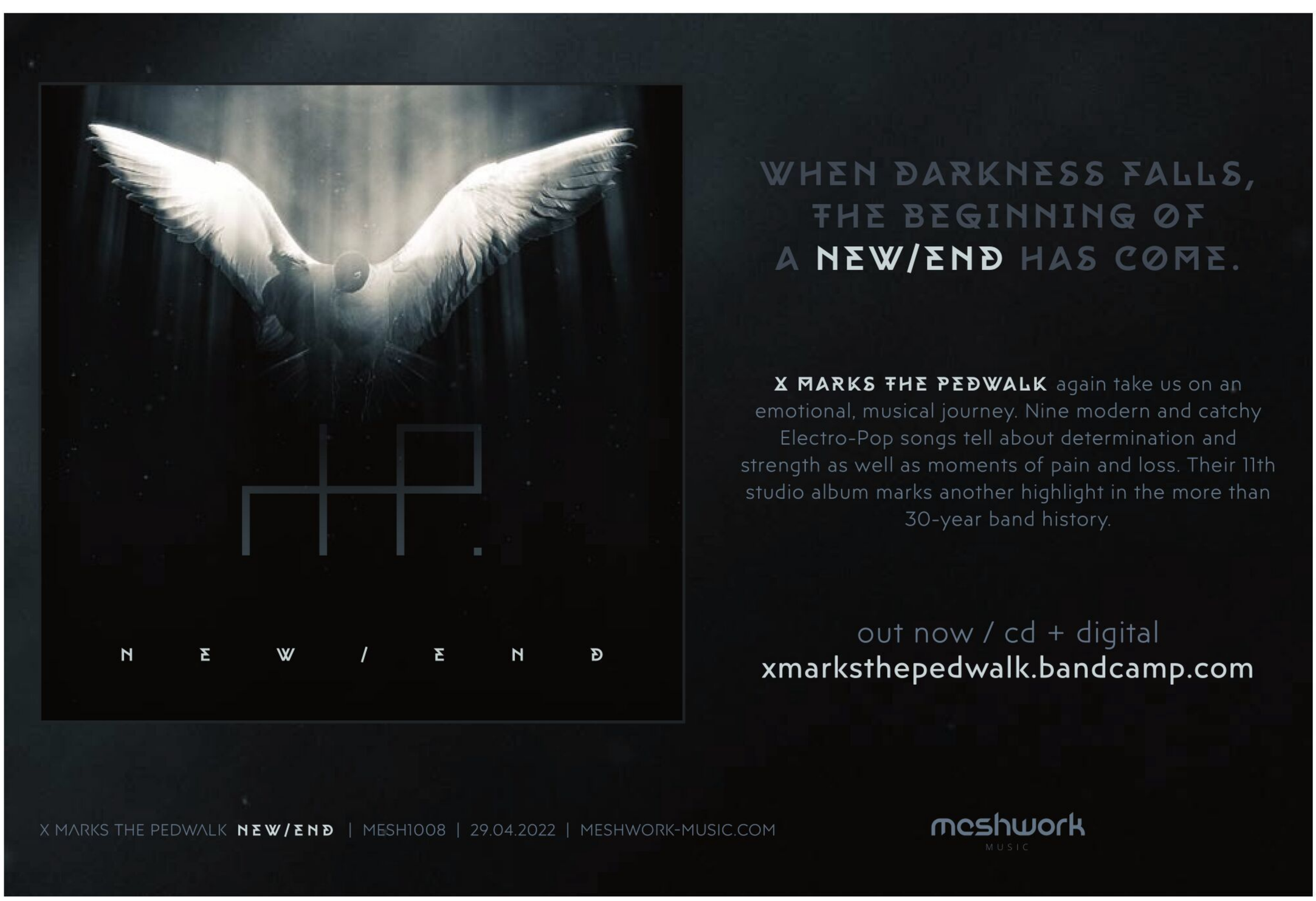
HERE'S JOHNNY!

Celebrating Kubrick's 'The Shining'

All work and no play may make Jack a dull boy, but there's no denying the work that's gone into this stunning package. 'The Shining: A Visual And Cultural Haunting' is an "immersive, multidimensional examination" of Kubrick's classic horror flick. Published by Rough Trade Books, this loose-leafed box set is disguised as protagonist Jack Torrance's own writing project (the one he's seen typing throughout the film).

"It's been over three years since we started seriously working on it," says Craig Oldham, who designed and edited the book. "Initially, my process with these things is curiously exploring a film and its themes and allowing it to take you where it will."

The book includes exclusive interviews with Jack Nicholson's co-stars, Shelley Duvall and Dan Lloyd, essays by HP Lovecraft and Sigmund Freud that were read by Kubrick in preparation for the film, as well as original contributions from the likes of Cosey Fanni Tutti and Mo' Wax founder James Lavelle on the film's and Kubrick's cultural legacy. For the £70 'Overlook Edition', you'll bag yourself an engraved replica of the red "Room 237" key fob, a sample of the Overlook Hotel carpet lining and a lovely-looking Maze poster. **roughtradebooks.com**



SOS

The British Library's Save Our Sounds project aims to save UK recordings from extinction. **Andy Linehan**, Curator of Popular Music, digs through some of the archive's priceless audio treasures. This month: The Shinkansen Collection

Founded by Ghislaine Boddington and cris cheek in east London in 1989 and named after the Japanese "bullet train" network, the shinkansen collective aimed to train, produce and promote British and international artists specialising in movement and sound research through a series of stand-alone projects in the UK and Europe. During its 15-year lifespan it promoted more than 800 events and worked with more than 6,000 artists.

The shinkansen collection ranges across many artistic disciplines, including voice work, live art and performance, movement research, dance and technology, sound art, web casting and telematics. It was acquired by the British Library in 2006 and comprises more than 750 items of audio and video documentation of live performances, workshops and debates, including the Bare Essentials dance season at the ICA, Voice Over, the London-wide festival of the human voice, plus many other festivals.

A particular highlight of the collection documents the creation and performances of Vinyl Requiem, a large-scale sound and film event by sound composer Philip Jeck, who sadly died recently, and visual artist Lol Sargent. The installation was developed in sections over four years and premiered in Vooruit, Gent and Union Chapel, London in 1993.

In this piece, a wall was created using 180 1950s Dansette record players, all painted white. On each turntable was a record from Jeck's personal collection of classical, contemporary and popular music. Each disc was customised either by scoring with a scalpel or with a sticker. They were manipulated by three operators and played repeated fragments with the work structured into orchestral sections such as string, piano, percussion, brass and spoken word. Still and moving images were projected live onto the white wall of Dansettes in response to the array of sounds emanating from them.

Jeck also contributed to The Sound Works Exchange, a network of British and German sound artists who released CDs of events and workshops staged by shinkansen and the Goethe-Institut, London. The masters for these are in the collection. They include works sampling BBC radio shows and Lance Dann's 'We Love You Dave', which features imaginary answerphone messages left for David Bowie.

The shinkansen collection is a fascinating record of a period when digital technologies were first incorporated and explored in new kinds of hybrid performance. Many of the early digital recording formats are now no longer used and so have been transferred as part of the Save Our Sounds project. They will soon be available to access at the British Library.

For more about Save Our Sounds visit bl.uk/save-our-sounds

ORCHESTRAL MANOEUVRES IN THE ART

Andy McCluskey releases artist's collection

It turns out OMD co-founder Andy McCluskey is also the foremost collector of oil paintings by little-known British artist Maurice Wade (1917-1991). Who knew? In total, McCluskey has 21 of Wade's moody, melancholic landscapes, which have now been compiled into an 80-page hardback book, sumptuously illustrated, printed and bound by Welsh fine art publishers, Gomer Press.

The paintings were also recently featured in an exhibition, 'Silent Landscapes: The Andy McCluskey Collection', at the Trent Art Gallery in Staffordshire – only the second exhibition of Wade's work in the past 40 years – and McCluskey is hopeful that both the show and book will bring the artist the attention his talent deserved. Order a copy for £25. **trent-art.co.uk**

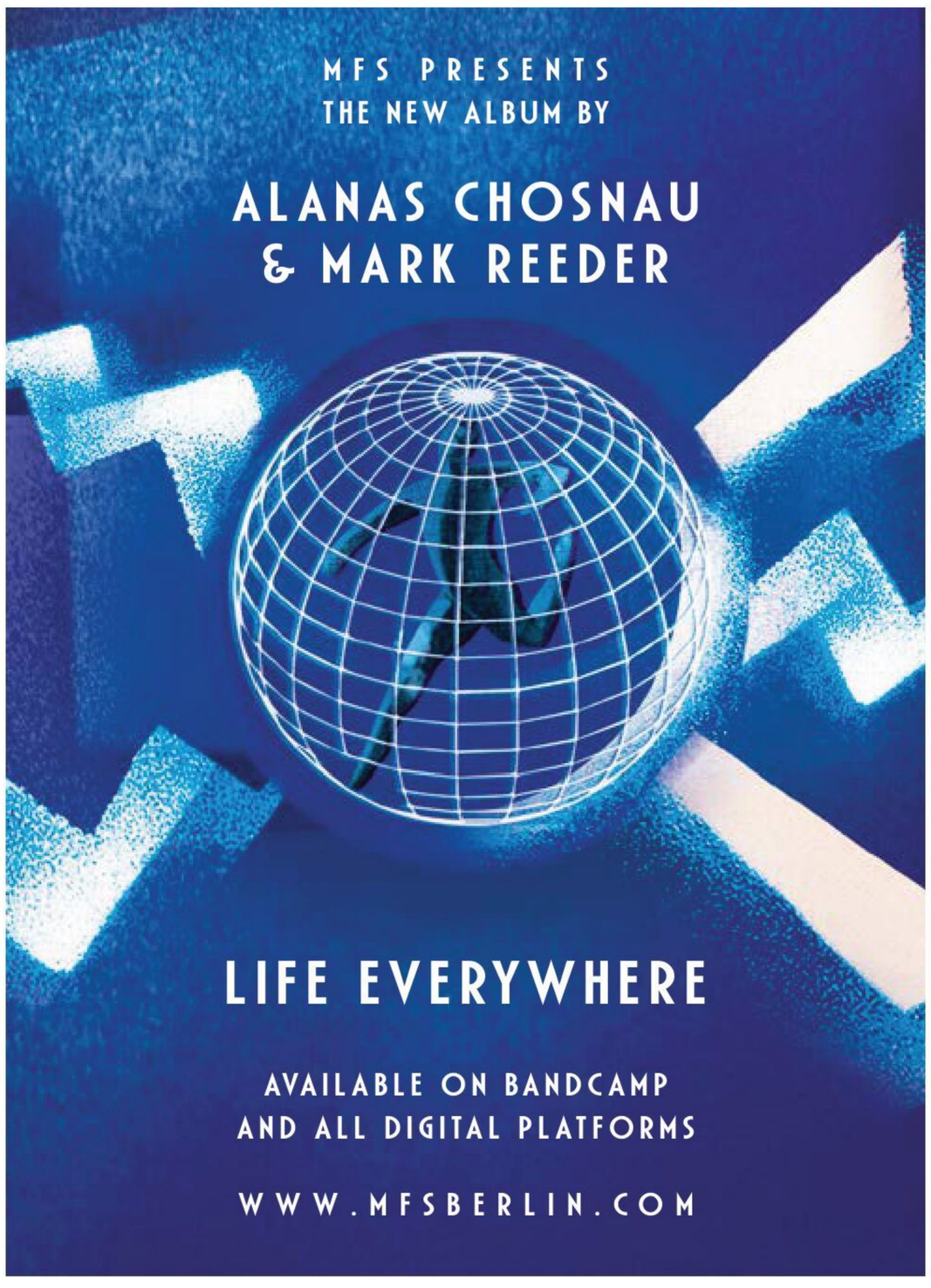
TRANSHUMAN EXPRESS

Ex-Kraftwerker offers up AI-inspired curio

Emil Schult made his name as the creative arm for Kraftwerk, designing artwork for 'Autobahn' and 'Radioactivity' as well as contributing lyrics. After that, he went on to study computer music, eventually earning a place at the Stanford Artificial Intelligence Laboratory in California.

This fascination with the human and the artificial has fuelled his creative projects ever since, including his work with Transhuman Art Critics, a trio made up of Schult, Emma Nilsson and Lothar Manteuffel. Their latest release, 'I Am Digitized – I Will Not Die', is a curious nine-minute ambient track with an artificial voice repeating the track title over and over.

When asking the trio what inspired the song, they are notably evasive. "The human dream," they say, "to be stored timelessly in digital form. Or is the AI dreaming?" If the meaning is elusive, its beauty is not. Each copy of the track arrives on transparent vinyl, printed with a unique engraving on gold leaf "executed by a robot", and the cardboard box it comes in is signed and dated. Only a handful are available to order from Cologne's JUBG gallery – contact them for a price. **jubg.space**



PULSE

MICHAEL C SHARP

Texan rocker moves downtempo

WHO THEY?

Now a central figure in the experimental electronic scene in Austin, Texas, Michael C Sharp initially gravitated toward the heavier end of the spectrum. The multi-instrumentalist previously held down the drum-stool slot for various punk bands and formed local psych collective Sungod. They were signed to HoloDeck, a label boasting a strong stable of electronic artists including the 'Stranger Things' soundtrackers S U R V I V E, which was the perfect place for Sharp to park the solo synth efforts he began releasing back in 2013.

WHY MICHAEL C SHARP?

Listening to his 2020 single 'Motor, Pt 2: White Lines' alongside newer releases reveals how gracefully Sharp has downshifted from Hawkwind territory to the more hypnotic grooves of classic Neu! albums. Sharp's latest double cassette collection, titled 'Private Tape Vol 4', pushes his sound further into ambient territory, as the seven tracks often clock in at well over 10 minutes. The textures here are rich, nuanced and melodic, and manage to be soothing while being thoroughly engaging. Even the shortest track – a sub-three-minute arpeggio workout called 'Time That Sticks Together' –dead-centres the bullseye.

TELL US MORE...

Having still not succumbed to the Eurorack rabbit hole, most of Sharp's work is built from a Korg Minilogue, the Rhodes-like Yamaha Reface CP and a 1990s vintage Boss DR-660. Yet some of his more triumphant moments undoubtedly come when he reaches for an electric six-string to complement his work. His 'Synth Vehicles For Guitar' album is epic, and it's when you get further into the more cinematic elements that you are most enthralled. The hardcore motorik cuts such as 'Eliminator' and the previously mentioned 'Motor, Pt 2' only help to seal the deal.

JOE SILVA

'Private Tape Vol 4' is out now

SCHOOL OF ELECTRONIC MUSIC

Resident archivist **Jack Dangers** examines a recent compilation of work by one of Robert Moog's first customers, Eric Siday

Eric Siday was born in Ealing in 1905. He played violin in popular jazz bands in London in the 1920s, including Ray Starita's Piccadilly Revels, who recorded for Columbia. He then presented a show on BBC radio, before emigrating to America in 1939.

Once he was in the USA, he started composing for television and adverts, and by the mid-1950s he was creating packages of commercial music for use by companies in their promotional material. He was one of the first people to come up with the idea of the sound logo, and he'd often use electronic instruments to create them.

You still hear one of them over here in the States at the end of re-runs of 'The Monkees'. It plays on the ident for the production company Screen Gems which comes up after the credits. There's a satirical documentary called 'The S From Hell' about that ident, and how it traumatised a whole generation of American kids in the 1960s. You can watch it on YouTube.

The jingle for it was recorded on an ondes Martenot. I think Siday sent it through the Turkish speaker – a speaker with a Turkish cymbal attached. The effect was a little like a spring reverb – a sound that's very characteristic of that instrument.

I have one of a series of library music 78s which Siday released in 1960, and it's really good. It was used in a couple of horror films and also turned up on a British programme called 'TV Heaven' back in the early 90s, where they broadcast an entire evening of TV shows and ads from a specific year. I watched that religiously. They showed a 'Tomorrow's World' from the mid-60s, where they demonstrated a video player with figures in front of a video screen dancing to his piece 'Conflict'. Other tracks from those 78s were on 1960s episodes of 'Doctor Who'.

In the 1960s, Siday became friendly with Robert Moog, buying possibly the first modular system he built. Like all of Moog's early customers, he contributed ideas to make the system more useable. Moog even designed and built a percussion module for him.

Siday made two LPs in 1971 – 'Sounds Of Now 1' and 'Sounds Of Now 2'. Then in 2014, Dual Planet released 'The Ultra Sonic Perception' featuring Siday's 78s and went on to re-release 'Sounds Of Now' in 2015.

Eric Siday died in Manhattan in 1976.

IMAGE IS EVERYTHING

Exhibition tells the life of the album cover

For decades, the album cover has provided photographers with a 30cm x 30cm square canvas to showcase their talents, while playing a pivotal role in defining artists and establishing the identity of record labels. 'For The Record: Photography & The Art Of The Album Cover' is the latest exhibition at The Photographers' Gallery in central London, featuring more than 200 album covers that spotlight the often overlooked contribution of the visionaries behind the lens.

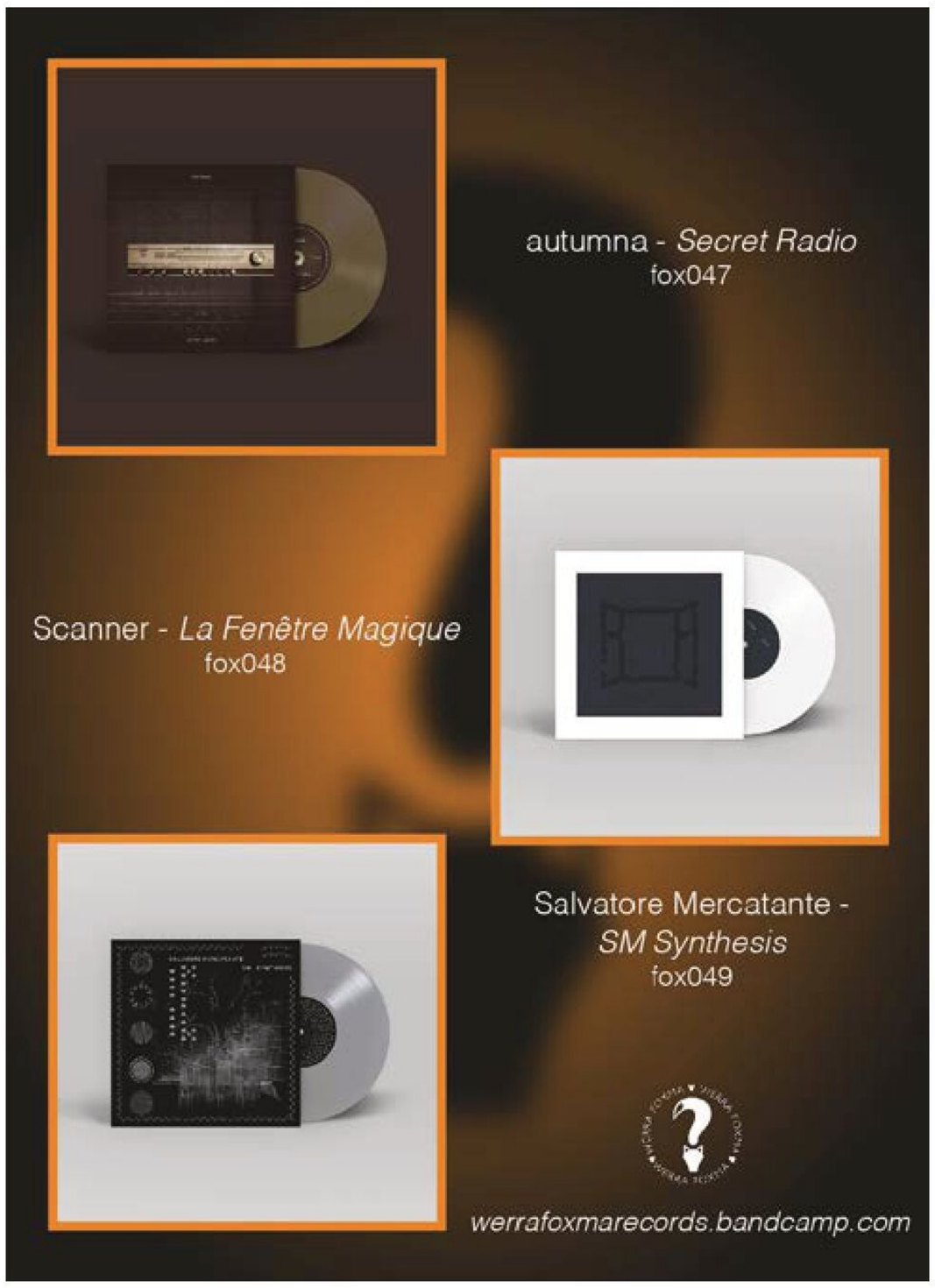
Many of the names featured are famous – Andy Warhol, Cindy Sherman, David Bailey, Nan Goldin – but the exhibition also explores the work of lesser-known snappers such as Francis Wolff, who enjoyed a fruitful collaboration with the Blue Note jazz label. It also looks at how the album cover has repurposed many of the century's social documentary images, including iconic photos taken by Jack Delano and Dorothea Lange. The exhibition runs until 12 June – book tickets now for just £5. **thephotographersgallery.org.uk**

OBER THE MOON

Doc celebrates work of iconic synth builder

Last month saw the release of a new documentary about Tom Oberheim, the 85-year-old American audio and electronics engineer best known for making analogue synths beloved of artists such as Van Halen (that epic synth riff on 'Jump' is played on an Oberheim), Prince ('1999') and Queen ('Flash Gordon').

It comes courtesy of software company GForce, whose 'Bright Sparks' film series from 2015 included profiles of Bob Moog and Don Buchla, but Oberheim declined to participate at the time. In Feb 2021, after the release of the GForce OB-E 8-Voice emulation, supposedly the first ever soft instrument to receive Oberheim's endorsement, they approached the pioneer again for an interview, and this time he accepted. Zipping through his life and career, the film also includes an interview with Marcus Ryle, a former Oberheim engineer, who imparts his experience of working at Oberheim in the 1980s. Free to watch. **youtube.com/c/GForceSoftware/videos**



PULSE

MUCKERS

West Country pastoral meets political

WHO THEY?

Not friends, or wellies, but Matt Huxley, the Bridport musician making joyful music inspired by the wonders of the West Country. After discovering the natural themes shaping the Muckers identity, you become subdued by the synaesthesia of rhythmic and rural landscapes, created with sounds so fresh that you start to smell woodland. Released on his London label Circle Dance, Huxley playfully translates Mother Nature into icy electronica that evokes a strong togetherness.

WHY MUCKERS?

Muckers' latest release, 'Dingly Dell', descends into a wild world of dark, foreboding nights and hope for spring, all while providing danceable beats. Glassy strings open the EP with anticipation, as doom and prosperity blend over groaning basslines on track 'Barl-E-Corn'. Winter is tangible. I envision a ship of people guided towards a lighthouse, feeling their way through the blackness to come ashore for a rave on the cliff's edge. While on 'Highway (A303 Mix)', the 'Autobahn'-esque plodding evolves through the four tracks with the meandering brightness of a Durutti Column track. Very pleasant on the ears.

TELL US MORE...

'Dingly Dell' can be purchased through Bandcamp on a special cassette that includes a B-side called 'Acid Camping'. This 11-minute piece features a monologue by Muckers, performed over rearranged music from the EP. It can also be listened to on ACFM, the radio show of which he is a producer. In a bit of a history lesson, we are taken on an informative trip through the more political ideas behind Circle Dance. Huxley looks with optimism to the future and how we can peacefully exist together in our rural areas. Sweet birdsong then summons this journey to an end. Lovely.

JESS BRETT

'Dingly Dell' is out now on Circle Dance

LITTLE WONDER

Tiny touchscreen synths from LA

1010music are best known for their Bitbox and Blackbox samplers. But their latest release – the Nanobox | Fireball – is another gorgeous-looking touchscreen wavetable "mini synth" that promises a serious sonic punch. Measuring approximately 3 by 4 inches, the Fireball boasts eight-voice polyphony, onboard effects, two wavetables and, claim 1010music, a "nearly-indestructible design", making it the perfect travel companion for synthesists everywhere.

"We are always on the lookout for a way to make digital instruments with a special twist," says 1010music founder Aaron Higgins. "We're big fans of portable sequencers, and wanted portable synthesisers to go with it. That was the inspiration for the Nanobox. We're happy that we can now use them all together in a portable jam rig." Order one now for around £359.
1010music.com

HOLY SHEET

Sakamoto scores now in print

Though Ryuichi Sakamoto calls it "a bit of a hassle", the Japanese composer has started releasing official piano scores for a number of his own compositions. Notated for solo piano, the series so far includes catalogue favourites such as 'Before Long' from 1987's 'Neo Geo', 'Merry Christmas Mr Lawrence' and 'Parolibre' from 1986's 'Futurista' (though the score adaptation is closer to the trio version that appeared on later album '1996').

"Usually, I am the only one playing," says Sakamoto. "So I have never created proper piano scores until now. It has resulted in a flood of independent transcriptions or arranged versions with the wrong notes and harmonies. I have started to think that, at my age, it is about time I document these pieces properly."

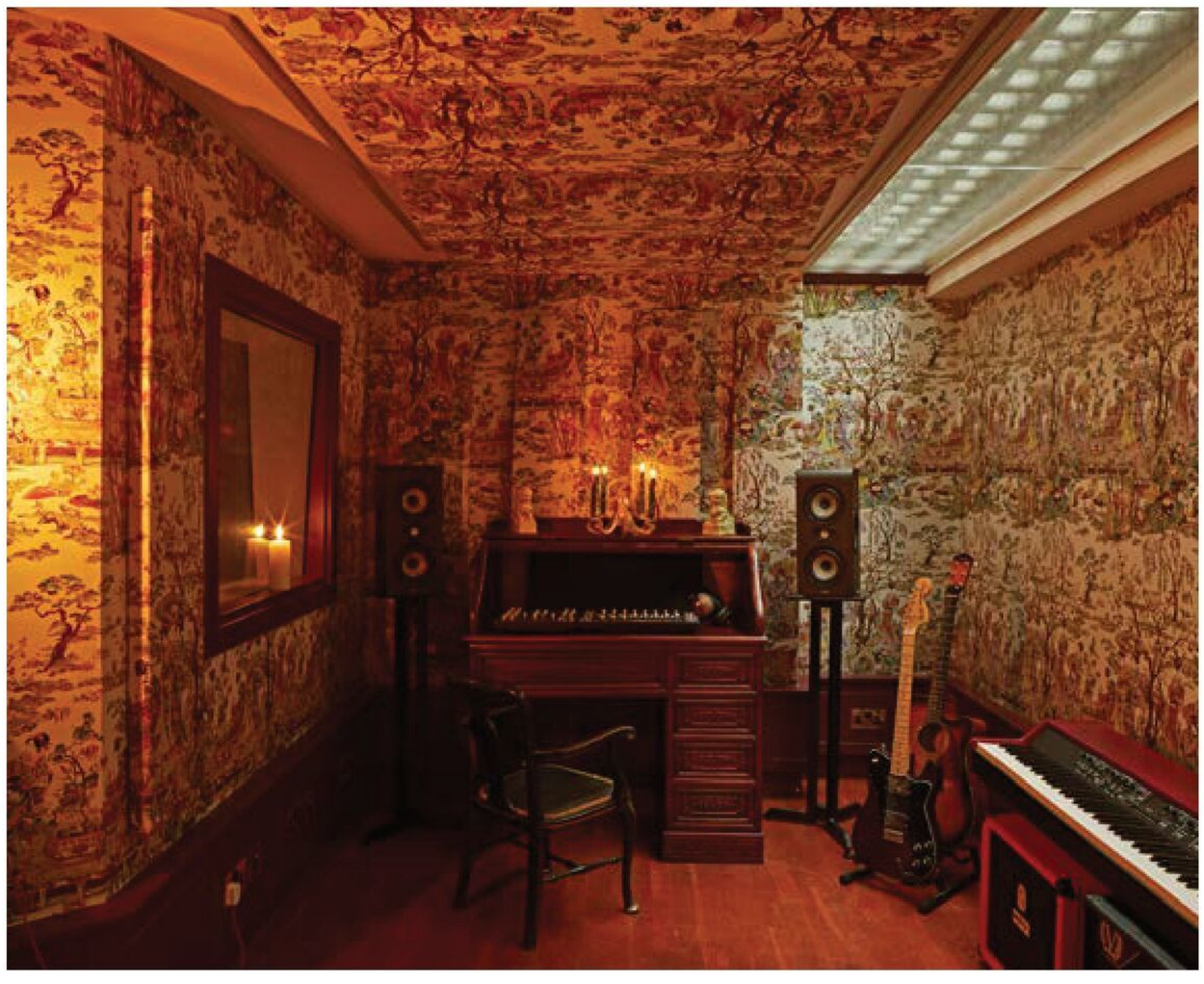
Available from the new Ryuichi Sakamoto Official Score Store, compositions can be purchased as downloadable PDFs for ¥990 (£6.40) or as fold-out hard copies for ¥2,310 (£15.69).
score-jp.sitesakamoto.com

CH-CH-CH-CH-CHANGES

Opening of Bowie-inspired London bar with recording rooms

"Beautiful coffee. Exquisite cicchetti. Gorgeous cocktails. Stunning recording studios. Sublime music. Always." So reads the website landing page of The Thin White Duke, with little other information than its address – 22 Great Windmill Street, London. But beyond all the enticing tipples one would hope for from a Soho joint in 2022, from absinthe-laced Boulevardiers to almond milk/gin aperitifs, The Thin White Duke's basement houses two state-of-the-art recording studios for members to commandeer at their leisure – according to their membership tier, that is. Pop-in visitors, meanwhile, will be able to order small plates and drinks from the bar.

The brainchild of designer Sasha Stamp and musician Giovanni Almonte, The Thin White Duke is, as you'd expect, heavily Bowie-themed. The Kyoto Room expresses Bowie's love for Japanese design, and upstairs has an industrial aesthetic straight from 1970s Berlin. Needless to say, the menu also features countless references to Bowie's back catalogue. With just 60 memberships available, don't hang about. **thethinwhiteduke.london**



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PULSE

FIGI

Space disco direct from Amsterdam

WHO THEY?

Figi is Vijay Auke Weemhoff, a Dutch DJ and producer whose stock is rising thanks to his brand of seriously funky, futuristic party music. He's not one to hide his light under a bushel, either, stating that he's "on a mission to bring boogie back to the 21st century".

WHY FIGI?

His latest EP proves once and for all that disco is the high watermark of civilisation (in case you didn't know that already). Featuring seven tracks – two ambient, four disco numbers and the synthpoppy 'Out Of Touch' – '2099' is an optimistic slice of future fantasy projection that was entirely assembled by Figi in the studio by multi-layering separate takes laid down by session players, much in the way Rolf-Ulrich Kaiser created the krautrock anomaly 'The Cosmic Jokers'. But the music emanating from his celestial speakers melds the bass of Bootsy Collins with the funky keyboard squelches of Herbie Hancock, and is suffused with the Didier Marouani-led space disco of 70s French proto-electronica outfit Space. Dr San Proper is on the mic for three songs, including 'Gotta Make A Call'. It transpires that in 2099, telepathy will still not have replaced old-fashioned telecommunications.

TELL US MORE...

Back here in 2022, Weemhoff is firmly caught up in the melting pot of his home city, Amsterdam. As the latest Magnetron signing, he joins a roster of acts who've been flying the flag for progressive analogue dance music from the Netherlands for a while now, including Fatima Yamaha and De Witte Kunst. The label has got the BBC playing some Dutch-language bangers, which is goed, ja?

JEREMY ALLEN

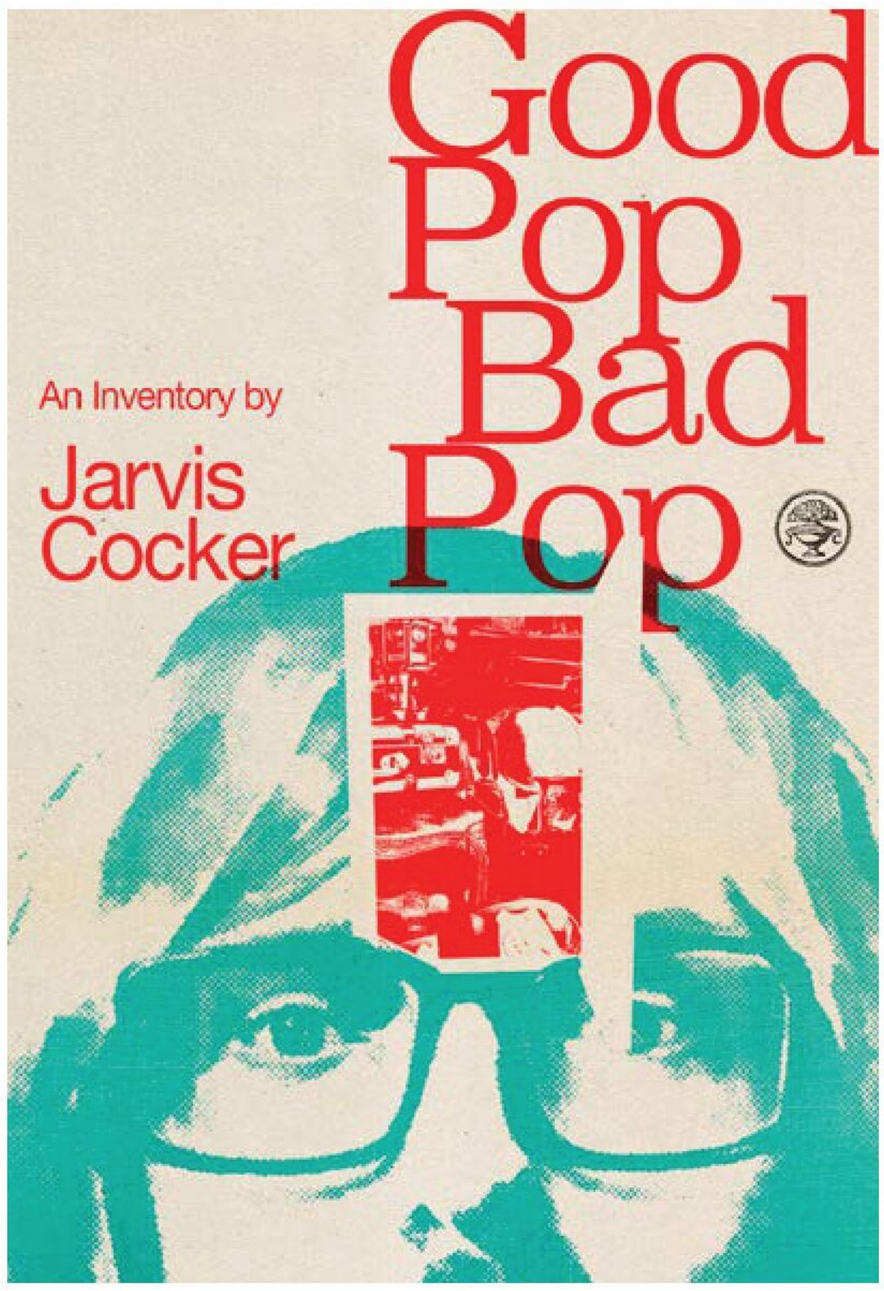
'2099' by Figi is out now on Magnetron Music

COCKER-A-HOOP

Jarvis' much-anticipated memoir arrives

Out this month on Penguin is Jarvis Cocker's 'Good Pop, Bad Pop', with the literal subtitle of 'An Inventory'. Sparked by a rummage through his loft, it finds the ex-Pulp man documenting his life according to all the ephemera – tickets, photos, broken specs – he's accumulated. Hugely entertaining it all is too, as you'd expect, with no holds barred.

Discovering a 'Sexy Laughs Fantastic Dirty Joke Book' is a way into discussing his nascent sexuality in a Sheffield swimming pool. A decades-old bar of Cussons Imperial Leather soap triggers an inquisition into his hoarder mindset. And a yellow BHS shirt takes him back to childhood jumble sales at his local church. The "accumulated debris" reveals as much about Cocker's style, creative process and personality as it does about 20th century pop culture. Published on 26 May, order it now on hardback for £20. **penguin.co.uk**



RESONATE TO ACCUMULATE

Ethical streaming company for your radar

Interested in alternative streaming platforms? You may want to check out Resonate. They're a platform with ambitions to build "a new music economy of streaming" centred around paying artists fair and square. Cooperatively owned by its artists, listeners and workers, there are no majority shareholders, and its founders were inspired by "resisting the urge to treat music as nothing more than audio wallpaper" and "rediscovering and engaging music as art made by real humans". There are some clever ideas too. Listen to a song nine times, and it gets automatically added to your collection. **resonate.is**

TIME MACHINE

Heldon guitarist and electronics innovator **Richard Pinhas** reflects on some memorable encounters with Kraftwerk

WORDS: JEREMY ALLEN

One afternoon in 1976, Richard Pinhas was at home in Paris minding his own business when the telephone rang. The French musician remembers taking the unexpected call in the same week his band Heldon's now-classic fifth album 'Un Rêve Sans Conséquence Spéciale' was released. Few people had his number at that time, so a call out of the blue elicited mild bemusement. The Frenchman picked up the receiver and was greeted by an unfamiliar female voice at the other end.

"Hello," said the disembodied voice in a posh German accent. "Kraftwerk want to meet you."

Sensing he was about to become the victim of an elaborate blag, Pinhas politely informed the woman he was aware he was being wound up and swiftly ended the call. Shortly afterwards, the phone rang again and the same thing happened. Then several minutes later, the phone started again and the ringing persisted.

"This is a joke," he stated firmly, hanging up for a third time.

He was considering dispelling the nuisance caller with stronger words on a fourth attempt, but this time he heard a different voice on the other end of the line.

"It was not the lady this time," says Pinhas, still sounding surprised. It was Ralf or Florian. "Their secretary had tried to speak to me, and when I kept putting the phone down they decided to call themselves. Whichever one it was, was talking in fluent French. Great French! He said, 'It's Ralf' or 'It's Florian', I can never remember which is which, to be honest…"

While Florian Schneider was born in what is now Baden-Württemberg in the French Occupied Zone on the German border, we'll assume it was Ralf Hütter, Kraftwerk's last man standing. Ralf conducted many eloquent interviews in France at the time of 'Tour De France' in 1983, which he'd also originally written in the language of the country that hosts the world's most famous cycling race.

"After several minutes on the phone, I realised it wasn't a wind-up," says Pinhas. "They really did want to see me."

At this time in musical history, Pinhas was only aware of about nine bands in the world making "music with a computer".

PHOTO: RICHARD DUMAS

"England, Japan… most were based in Germany, actually," he recalls. "In France, we only had the Moog and E-MU Systems."

He hadn't paid much heed to most of his electronic competitors, though Kraftwerk were unavoidable – 'Radioactivity' was a big hit in France in the summer of 1976. Moreover, he was a fan. The idea that they could be calling him seemed preposterous – Heldon had been making waves, but Pinhas was just starting out, having recently chosen rock 'n' roll over lecturing in philosophy at the Sorbonne.

"Because for me, you know, electronic music is still rock 'n' roll!" he adds, emphatically.

Aged 25, he'd been eking out a living playing synth sessions for other artists at Studio Davout in Paris, with Heldon making records in the downtime thanks to him having a key to the building. Access to the 16-track gave the band thousands of pounds worth of recording time that he never would have been able to afford ordinarily.

And now, here he was on Kraftwerk's radar. Not only that, they'd been interested enough to track down his personal telephone number. Pinhas never found out how they obtained it, but assumes it was via management. Whatever the reason, Hütter and Schneider were rapacious for electronic music in the 1970s. Once, when visiting New York, they insisted Lester Bangs hand over his copy of 'Suicide' by Suicide on the spot, after he'd just introduced them to it.

Pinhas met Hütter and Schneider at the Pavillon de Paris in Pantin a few months later. Kraftwerk were performing for French national radio (a bootleg of that show proved hugely popular and can now be found on YouTube). Pinhas had brought along a copy of Heldon's new album as a gift, though the pair had already purchased the record at a megastore in Paris and were carrying it in a white canvas bag. There was embarrassed laughter, and the men became friends immediately. Kraftwerk even invited Pinhas to visit them at Kling Klang in Düsseldorf, an offer he was unable to take up because of work commitments.

The next time they got together was 1981, when Kraftwerk were playing a promotional show at the intimate Captain Vidéo, a venue inside Studio Gabriel off the Champs-Elysées, that briefly put on special concerts by Ultravox, Duran Duran, King Crimson and 'Computer World'-era Kraftwerk. Around 600 lucky punters had been able to see the show, and afterwards, Pinhas was beckoned upstairs for an after-party, expecting to see a swathe of industry bods getting quietly hammered on EMI's hospitality.

Pinhas wandered into a huge empty room, where there were just the members of the band, a few friends and four conspicuous automatons. He was gobsmacked.

"They'd just played Paris and we were on this floor that stretched about 100 metres, and here was this tiny committee and four robots. Wow! It looked like it was supposed to be a big party with these robots, but nobody saw them except us."

Fast forward to 2013, and Pinhas saw Kraftwerk once more as a punter, when he performed at Sónar Festival in Barcelona with Pascal Comelade. He remembers flying back to France from the US and being diverted to Germany because of a national strike in France, and making it on stage just in time for a line check. He and Comelade played to around 1,000 people, then his comrade went off home.

"So I stayed with my girlfriend, and we went to the Kraftwerk concert the next day and had some mushrooms."

The then-62-year-old had the time of his life watching with 20,000 others whilst hallucinating out of his gourd.

"It was gorgeous, immense, colossal!" he exclaims. "Everything was atomistic. You know, like quantum perception. I hadn't taken mushrooms for 20 years, but I was with my girlfriend and I didn't have to work, so why not?"

Slightly broadening Guy Debord's sprayed Situationist manifesto, he adds… "Never work on drugs. It's very bad."

Pinhas says he was very impressed at the stamina of Ralf Hütter, a man five years his senior, performing for two hours and playing many of the parts live, a fact often lost in all of the spectacle.

"Or was it Florian?" he says. "I can never remember which one is which."

Heldon's 'Antelast' album is out now on Bam Balam

LANDMARKS

DAVE MUDDYMAN, 1957 - 2022

Loop Guru co-founder dies aged 64

We are very saddened to report the death of Dave Muddyman, co-founder of Loop Guru and one of the pioneers of the 1990s worldbeat scene in the UK.

Muddyman started in the music industry at Island Records, where he was a regular member of the label's football team. He usually played in goal and faced Bob Marley on a number of occasions. After a spell as the keyboardist with post-punk outfit The Transmitters, Muddyman formed Loop Guru with fellow Transmitter Sam Dodson in 1985, experimenting with tape loops and samples for several years before making their debut with 'Shrine' on Nation Records in 1992.

Fusing dance beats with Asian and African sounds, Loop Guru's best-known albums include 'Duniya', 'Amrita' and the epic ambient piece 'The Third Chamber', the latter built around Muddyman's gamelan playing. The group spearheaded the worldbeat scene in the UK alongside Transglobal Underground, whose line-up included two other former Transmitters. Outside of Loop Guru, Muddyman also worked as a sound archivist, recording material in Indonesia and Africa, and was a writer and editor for the 'Rough Guide' music books.

An explorer by nature, in more recent times Dave Muddyman developed a keen interest in modular synthesis. He released no less than seven solo ambient albums under the name Echoflex in the two years before he died. **echoflex.bandcamp.com**

PRESERVATION SOCIETY

Pop culture archive opens in Manchester

Last month saw the launch of the British Pop Archive, a new "national collection dedicated to the preservation and research of popular culture" in the UK. The first large- scale project of its kind, the collection is held at the John Rylands Research Institute and Library at the University of Manchester – and it already holds a fair amount of goodies. Gain access to the archives of Joy Division manager Rob Gretton, totemic author Jon Savage's Situationist materials, the Ian Curtis archive (including the singer's handwritten lyric to 'She's Lost Control'), and the original acetate of 'Unknown Pleasures'. Much of this will be on show at the British Pop Archive exhibition, which opens on 19 May. **manchester.ac.uk**

Oceanic's David Harry and Jorinde Williams talk us through the making of **'Insanity'**, their 1991 dance mega-hit

INTERVIEW: IAN BERRIMAN

David Harry: "I met [third member of Oceanic] Frank Crofts on CB radio. For my 15th birthday, my mum bought me an old mono Yamaha CS-5 synth. One day, I plugged it into the mic input on the CB rig and was just making weird noises to piss someone off, and Frank heard it. He had a Bontempi organ, and we just started talking, messing around and playing each other noises over the CB. About 1987 or '88 we put a band together called Smart Patrol, named after a Devo song."

Jorinde Williams: "I'd started doing backing vocals for a couple of Liverpool bands that went nowhere. At the same time, I worked in a bar where all the bartenders were gay. We used to go out clubbing afterwards, and that's when I got into hi-NRG. I worked out that a lot of hi-NRG 12-inches had instrumental B-sides. So I started going on the road doing the gay clubs, with a tape that had my own cobbled-together backing vocals. Then I met those two."

DH: "Oceanic didn't exist until Jorinde came along. I started a small recording studio above a music shop in Birkenhead. While I was doing stuff with my proper band, I was experimenting with dance stuff. We were asking around for singers. Jorinde comes in, and right from the get-go it was like, 'Fucking hell, this is awesome!'."

JW: "It was a complete fluke because my mate, who was the girlfriend of the guy in the shop downstairs, had gone and wasn't right for it. She told me about it. I came in to an 8-track sequence they'd knocked up on the Ensoniq ESQ-1 synthesiser. It was just bass and drums at that stage."

DH: "Some of the dancey stuff we were doing was under the name Systems Exclusive. I thought one track was worth a bit more than just being some weird instrumental. That's what Jorinde listened to."

JW: "I'd been doing a sound tech course, and the guy teaching it had a rave-y thing going. He had this instrumental, and I went, 'I could write to that'. So I sat and wrote, 'Dream tripping, tripping on my dream / You're the only thing I want to believe in'. But it never happened – he kept it as an instrumental, so I had that kicking around. Then I wrote the chorus in the room with Dave and Frank, and I did the other half of the verse. I wanted ambiguity in there. The lyric was actually written about sex, but I wanted it to sound like it was about drugs."
DH: "It didn't take much convincing for the populace to think it was about drugs! Especially when you're in a club full of people on ecstasy…"
JW: "Then I was like, 'How do we change it?'. So the tempo changed. I had the sustained note – the 'Take m–e-e-e-e-e' – and it was Dave's idea to take it to the major. We literally wrote it then and there."
DH: "It came together that fast. We weren't a signed band, so we had no preconceptions, no pressures. It took maybe two days to batter down some more bits and pieces. But it was all effectively a day's work."
JW: "We knew we had something, because the hook stayed with you."
DH: "Me and Jorinde were both on the same page – pop music. We wanted to do something with catchy lyrics."
JW: "Pop dance, no samples."
DH: "That was a very deliberate move – it was a purist thing about not ripping off somebody else. If you give a five-year-old a bunch of samples they can throw it in the air and its gonna come out sounding like something. 'Insanity' was the arse-end of a four-track EP initially – Side B, track two. We pressed up 1,000 white labels, and it did fuck-all. We literally sold 20 copies."
JW: "Then some DJ in Legends in Warrington started playing the arse out of it, and it started to build. The A&R guy from Dead Dead Good was on a night out in Legends, saw it take the roof off, and went, 'What the fuck is that record – and is it signed?'."
DH: "I basically remixed that track overnight before we got signed. We turned up to the label with a DAT [of the 'Legendary Mix'] that we'd literally finished off a few hours earlier."
JW: "That was where we came up with the middle eight, the 'Taking me higher' bit. I did it that night, and gave myself a rod for my back for the next 30 years."
DH: "People typically associate indie with guitar music, but we were the best-selling indie single of the year. I wouldn't say that was bigger than being in the Top 10 singles of the year ['Insanity' was Number 9], but that was a massive achievement.

"It became an albatross for us, though. When you've had something that is such a big seller, unless you're signed to a major and have serious money behind you, there's no way you can ever follow it up. It was a nightmare."
JW: "I got vocal nodules very badly. We were gigging four nights a week. I was working at the top of my range, at one o'clock in the morning, in rooms where you're allowed to smoke and there was dry ice, so I fucked my voice good-style. That's why I haven't worked in the music industry much since."
DH: "We got caught up really badly with the success of the song. It's the commercial pressure and the fact that everyone around you at business level is making money out of you. They've got no interest in your welfare, mentally or physically."
JW: "It's still the best thing that's ever happened to us, though, because it gave us the confidence to do everything else that we've done in our lives. It gave us validation that we could achieve what we wanted to achieve."

MINIMAL TO THE MAX

As Plastikman, Richie Hawtin is the king of reduction. But ‘Consumed In Key’, a collaboration with piano maestro Chilly Gonzales, is a radically different take on minimal techno, a step into uncharted territory that pushes both artists way beyond their comfort zones. The result is simply stunning

WORDS: BEN MURPHY
PICTURES: CAMILLE BLAKE

Music absorbed Richie Hawtin's imagination when he was growing up in the suburbs of Windsor, Ontario. It began influencing him before he was even aware of it.

"When I was seven, my dad painted the back wall of my parents' bedroom with the cover of Pink Floyd's 'Dark Side Of The Moon'," says Hawtin. "He was always playing with the hi-fi and listening to lots of crazy music. At one point in my teenage years, I started going through his records and I found Kraftwerk and Tangerine Dream… and they took me deeper. I remember listening to 'Autobahn' throughout high school, from beginning to end, and it was such an incredible journey. I loved the sounds – even though I didn't know what they were at that point – synthesised, electronic, spacey sounds."

For Hawtin, these early epiphanies hinted at the infinite potential of machine-made music, informing the records he would make as techno innovator and acid aficionado Plastikman. The Canadian artist's first two Plastikman albums, 'Sheet One' (1993) and 'Musik' (1994), on which he used the squirming cyborg tones of the Roland TB-303 synth to craft melodic and mysterious acid tracks with a haunting splendour, quickly catapulted him into the public consciousness.

Despite the avowedly underground nature of these albums, Plastikman generated a huge popular following with his singular style and distinctive logo, before he retreated back to the lab to forge a series of minimalist masterpieces through the late 1990s and early 2000s, altering his output completely. Although he has since become an extremely famous DJ under his own name, Richie Hawtin's work as Plastikman retains its enigmatic power.

Over the past year-and-a-half, Plastikman has ventured into unknown territory, creating a new album that takes him a long way outside his comfort zone. 'Consumed In Key' is a total reimagining of his sparse and atmospheric 1998 classic 'Consumed', made in collaboration with musical shapeshifter and provocateur Chilly Gonzales. It inhabits the cavernous sonic architecture of the original with eloquent piano that hints at classical, jazz and film music, preserving the spectral depletion of Hawtin's earlier achievement but taking it into another dimension. It's like Chopin or Debussy through a techno lens, with Miles Davis looking on and David Lynch in the director's chair.

'Consumed In Key' is an addictive record that really transports you somewhere else. On 'Converge (In Key)', the rhythmic thump of the beat and the bass evokes the pumping of blood and fluttering of aortic chambers in a huge heart, while Chilly Gonzales' subtle piano playing flows through a stream of sighing synths like tumbling platelets. 'Cor Ten (In Key)' echoes and throbs like some gigantic underground factory, as spellbinding notes are swept up on airy thermals. 'Locomotion (In Key)' opens with dubby effects and plangent chords, before the keys take on a sinister tone over the linear rhythm with a circular riff you might hear in a horror film.

What's especially intriguing about 'Consumed In Key' is that it exists at all. Richie Hawtin and Chilly Gonzales (whose real name is Jason Beck) didn't know each other before they came together for this record. While Gonzales has worked with electronic megastars such as Daft Punk, Peaches and Boys Noize, and his own discography features everything from electro to hip hop to instrumental piano vignettes, he hasn't released anything approaching minimal techno before.

A classically trained concert pianist (and holder of the Guinness World Record for the longest continuous live performance of 27 hours), Gonzales' previous material has often had a tongue-in-cheek or humorous component, although his 'Solo Piano' series has seen him lean into his mastery of the keyboard. He heard the original 'Consumed' for the first time a few years ago and, struck by its simplicity and its atmosphere, decided to try his hand at embellishing the tracks.

"The two of us collaborating will be a surprise for many," admits Hawtin. "But the main feedback has been that people are enjoying this new sonic experience."

Hawtin is speaking to me from Portugal, where he is escaping the often harsh late winter of Berlin, the city he's called home for almost two decades. Dressed in customary monochrome hues, he's sitting on an outdoor balcony, the screen doors behind him reflecting the towering apartment blocks opposite.

"It does seem a little surprising at first," agrees Gonzales, talking as he walks through the streets of Cologne on a crisp, sunny, blue-sky day. "And then people go, 'Wait a second, they're both Canadian, both independent-thinking musicians, both known within their fields for doing things that don't make sense immediately but retroactively *always* make sense'. I believe one of the reasons I was attracted to 'Consumed' is that the rhythms are different to what I would think of in electronic music. So for me, that means Richie is a like-minded musician from the get-go."

Gonzales' "demos" for 'Consumed In Key' – piano accompaniments he played over MP3s he had downloaded – were initially merely a hobby project for him. But when he played them to Tiga, another Canadian artist and a mutual friend, the concept began to crystallise in the weird hinterland of the first pandemic lockdowns.

"Tiga loved it," says Gonzales. "I think he was hungry for something new. It was around April or May in 2020 that I sent him the first three demos and right away he said, 'I'm going to try to make this happen. I know Richie. Let's see what he thinks'."

"Music is about timing – period," says Hawtin. "And this was absolutely on point when Tiga called. He's a long-time friend and he's always been a complete Plastikman fanatic. When he brought up this idea and started explaining it to me, it already had a weight of authenticity. I knew he wouldn't broach the subject unless he felt there was something in it, so I had to take it seriously. He explained that Chilly was behind it and that demos had already been done. As much as I was apprehensive to listen to them, I knew about Chilly and his position in the industry. I had to respect that an artist had taken the trouble to do this of their own free will."

"I was in love with the original 'Consumed'," explains Tiga. "It was an album I had listened to deeply hundreds of times and one that I held in the highest regard. The idea – and the problem – of integrating it with Chilly Gonzales' piano playing, of the clash of those worlds, was really appealing. Plus, Chilly rarely told me that he loved an electronic record, so it was an exciting proposition."

As Hawtin came to understand Gonzales' vision, he cast his mind back to the making of 'Consumed'. He noticed a parallel between the isolation he'd felt then and the lack of human contact we have all experienced in the last two years.

"When I was doing the album, I was in the dead of winter in Canada," remembers Hawtin. "I was hardly talking to anybody. It was just me and the machines. Over 20 years later, when we got to the mixing stage of this new record, it was a similar situation. It was just me and Chilly and the machines."

Released in 1998, 'Consumed' was a radical departure from Plastikman's earlier dreamy acid and fierce percussion tracks, stripping back his sound to its bare bones. Similarly, 'Consumed In Key' is considerably different to anything Richie Hawtin has done before – and it's a record he hopes will resonate.

"'Consumed' was a huge surprise for the public when it came out, especially for the Plastikman fans who were expecting melodically driven acid, the 'Sheet One' type of thing," he says. "I love that the original album was challenging when people first heard about it or listened to it. And perhaps this rendition is doing the same thing. I think when you do challenge people, you make waves and get their attention."

Beyond its significance as a techno landmark, 'Consumed' has taken on another life, with the likes of sculptor Anish Kapoor and fashion designer Raf Simons citing it as an inspiration. Simons even invited Hawtin to perform for him at the Guggenheim Museum in New York in 2013. With its clean lines and multi-dimensional elements, the album is almost like an audio installation and, interestingly, Hawtin says Kapoor and other visual artists were a big influence on him when he was recording it.

"I do think it's very architectural," he notes. "It's a word that I used when it first came out. It's about architecture and space."

Hawtin was also reading a lot of jazz biographies in the late 90s, including the renowned 'Miles: The Autobiography' by Miles Davis, whose understated, barely-there trumpet playing, displayed on albums like 'In A Silent Way', made a clear imprint on 'Consumed'.

"The idea of not playing notes and missing notes, of allowing a space between them or allowing people to hear things that aren't there, was a huge concept that I interpreted from Miles Davis' words," says Hawtin.

The use of space was one of the aspects that attracted Chilly Gonzales to the project. His earliest records featured the evocative soundtrack sampladelia of songs like 'Let's Groove Again', but his 2004 album 'Solo Piano' was a very different beast. The short and stunning piano pieces found a wider audience and gradually became a series, with 'Solo Piano III' appearing in 2018.

As an artist who has tried to reconcile the rigidity of his classical training with an urge to experiment, Gonzales was immediately impressed by 'Consumed', which is why he wanted to see if his playing would sit in that context.

"I struggled a long time with some of the traps of being a trained musician," he explains. "Overplaying, the temptation to show off rather than connect… these are things that took me years to get over – to unlearn, in a sense. The confidence that's in the space on 'Consumed', I had heard nothing like that in electronic music before. It felt fresh, like another category of depth. It instantly made me wonder if I might have something to say that would go alongside that, rather than on top of it."

With Tiga on board as executive producer, Hawtin and Gonzales collaborated remotely on 'Consumed In Key', Hawtin working to embed and complement the piano in a way that made sense to the original sound of the record. 'In Side (In Key)' is one of the few tracks where the Plastikman acid tones are evident, the 303s bubbling up under the arrangement with malevolent intent, while Gonzales' playing is restrained yet similarly disquieting. On 'Contain (In Key)', the eerie notes cascade in an intense dub zone, drifting like dust motes, with Hawtin adding delay effects to heighten the mood.

"Chilly's contributions made me sit down and listen very carefully," he says. "I took my time to reach an opinion about them, not rushing to a judgement of saying, 'How could somebody approach filling up or adding to an album that was so much about reduction?'. After hearing the first three demos, there were moments where I thought it was beautiful and respectful to 'Consumed', but there were other moments where I wasn't sure. It grabbed me enough to know we had to continue, though."

Gonzales, meanwhile, admits he found the project tough, especially in terms of trying to determine how to incorporate his world into Hawtin's.

"How do you make a work that seems like a closed universe open up again?" he questions. "I often thought, 'What if someone decided to add beats to 'Solo Piano'?'. That's maybe the best analogue I can think of – no pun intended – for how Richie must have felt.

"Some of the ideas came instantly. But then there were other portions where I had to study them like I would study a classical score back in the day in order to really understand, 'OK, what is Franz Liszt actually trying to say here? How do I see into this architecture to be able to do justice to the material?'. That process was more frustrating, but also more rewarding. It led to moments of actual tears of release in a couple of cases."

Hawtin and Gonzales are both keen to point out that 'Consumed In Key' is not a remix album. Gonzales says he sees it as closer to the variations of pieces that occur in classical music. And there is already some precedent for the techno and classical realms colliding in this way, with Carl Craig and Moritz Von Oswald just two of the contemporary artists who have contributed to this dialogue, composing new takes on Ravel and Mussorgsky.

"I don't consider 'Consumed In Key' to be a remix at all," notes Hawtin. "I think I was scared of it being a remix at the beginning, and when I received Chilly's parts and went into the studio, my first attempts were also trying to remix it, to bring everything into the universe of 'Consumed'. But as I listened more, and understood more about Chilly as an artist, it started to take on a different life."

"I think the 're' is what we're trying to get away from," adds Gonzales. "I'm not someone who has internalised the general cultural signifier of the remix, or what remix culture is. I know it's an important part of electronic music, and hip hop of course, with sampling. However, there's something called the Urtext that I've talked about here and there. It's a German word for the sanctity of the original text. That doesn't mean you don't compose a theme with variations, which I suppose would be the closest thing to a remix in classical music, but I did not play a note that wasn't somehow hinted at in the original. I think that means this is not a remix."

One thing that made it possible for Gonzales to add his augmentations to 'Consumed In Key' was his distance from the techno scene. Free from the codes, customs and strictures of the genre, he felt able to contribute without limitations, adding something truly original in the process.

"Hearing 'Consumed' for the first time some 20 years after it came out and not being an insider of that scene – unlike Tiga – meant I was free from a kind of reverence that might have scuttled the whole thing," says Gonzales. "I remember when my hands played the hands of Serge Gainsbourg in the biopic of his life. Not being French and not really rating Gainsbourg or knowing much about him was the reason they chose me to do it. They said, 'No French musician can see Gainsbourg with any kind of objectivity'."

I have another conversation with Richie Hawtin a few days later. This time, he's in his happy place – in the recording studio. His hair is back to the trademark Hawtin undercut and he's surrounded by synths, drum machines and effects units of every size and shape, crowding the racks and shelves behind him.

"It's not a virtual backdrop, it's the real thing!" he grins.

Hawtin was born in the UK, in Oxfordshire, and his family moved to Canada when he was nine. They settled in Windsor, Ontario, a mere half a mile from the US border. The lights of Detroit were a tantalising sight, viewed at a distance over the vast river that separates the two cities. There wasn't a huge amount to do in Windsor and, as an electronic music fan, he was considered an outcast by most of his peers.

"There was no scene in Windsor and I was like one of the weird kids in school," he says. "There were five of us who wore black and were into goth and electronic music. Most people thought we were gay and heckled us. There was one great shop in Windsor called Sound Effects and they got a lot of the 80s industrial records, plus Mute stuff from London and Nettwerk stuff from Vancouver. But at some point, you've kind of exhausted everything and you have to go further. That was when I started crossing into Detroit, which was where I really found out what clubbing was all about."

Hawtin's expeditions to Detroit led to his discovery of techno – the music the Motor City has been justly famous for since the late 1980s. He started DJing soon afterwards and set up the Plus 8 label with fellow spinner John Acquaviva in 1990, the imprint becoming a successful outlet for foundational artists such as Detroit's own Kenny Larkin and Dutch pioneer Speedy J, as well as arch minimalist Daniel Bell, who Hawtin worked with under the name Cybersonik.

It was Hawtin's solo material as F.U.S.E. that began to attract the attention of audiences outside of Detroit. The 1991 track 'Substance Abuse' – a hard-as-nails stomp with acerbic acid frequencies – got him noticed internationally. Another track, 'F.U.', meanwhile demonstrated his command of mesmeric rhythms, albeit augmented by claps that sound like an industrial drop hammer.

A one-off white label 12-inch with Leeds techno duo LFO followed in 1993 and piqued the interest of Warp Records in the UK. A few months later, Warp issued the debut F.U.S.E. album, 'Dimension Intrusion', as part of their acclaimed 'Artificial Intelligence' series. In keeping with Hawtin's early singles, it combined ambient electronics with IDM pieces such as 'A New Day' and was an embryonic hint of where he might go next.

The first Plastikman record arrived around the same time. Released on Daniel Miller's techno sub-label NovaMute, 'Spastik' was a percussive maelstrom that stripped away any intricacies and niceties, focusing entirely on the beats. It felt like something brand new and was quickly heralded as one of the key records of the minimal techno drive pioneered by Hawtin and other innovators such as Robert Hood and Daniel Bell.

But it was 'Sheet One', Plastikman's debut album, that really caused a stir. The cover art, depicting the dancing, slightly sinister Plastikman logo, was striking and the tunes within were decidedly different. 'Plasticity' had acid lines that unfurled dreamily in echoic reverb space and 'Glob', with its spacey 303 riff and funked-up rhythms, was suitable for both clubs and headphone head trips. Perhaps best of all was 'Plasticine', where the acid line materialised slowly, like a hallucination, and was by turns poignant, exquisite and unnerving.

According to Hawtin, the album was born from a desire to create electronic music that was neither ambient nor banging, but somewhere in-between. He particularly wanted to craft a record that had a narrative thread, like the classic electronica he'd grown up listening to.

"'Sheet One' was recorded in one session," he says. "It had this hypnotic sense I was trying to get to. Most of the electronic albums back then were just compilations of everybody's singles, so it was all kind of 'boom, boom, boom'. At first, I didn't know 'Sheet One' was going to be a Plastikman record, but I remember sitting down to do something that was going to be a real album. The reference points were the great journeys you would go on with Kraftwerk or Tangerine Dream."

From the outset, Hawtin was keen to push the techno form into new areas. The genius of Plastikman was to put the Roland TB-303 acid box centre stage, in a way that revealed its capacity for emotion and sensuality, rather than being a device for making corrosive noise.

"Many of us in the industry were like, 'How does this music reach beyond the clubs? How do we make this more like something for our everyday lives?'," says Hawtin. "Something to wake up to, to listen to in your living room and in your dining room, as well as in the clubs. Because we were living it. And that needed a different type of output and a different album.

"I was getting sick of hard acid tracks too. I think the acid machine is beautiful and I was trying to find the beauty I'd heard in some of the early acid house records, even in Phuture, and make it more slippery and slidey. There was a lot of octave jumping and slides [an effect you can program on the 303 to make notes ease into one another], which is very sexy. That was what I was trying to get. Even when it gets reduced in 'Consumed', you can hear that. It's hypnotic and still driving, but not really abrasive."

Early copies of the 'Sheet One' CD came with an inlay perforated to resemble a sheet of LSD tabs and the psychedelic sounds of the album reflected the acid-soaked parties Hawtin was DJing at in Detroit. That's also where the name Plastikman came from. The music took on the psychotropic tone of the last hours of the nights, as the drugs began to wear off and Hawtin dialled everything down, the dancers responding by moving with a spontaneus elasticity and a sinuousness.

"We were into acid, we were tripping out," he admits. "There was always a moment towards the end of my sets – hour five or hour six – where I'd start playing super-minimal stuff, or playing tracks slower than they should be, and people would do this fluid dancing. They looked like they had plasticity.

"There was another moment at the end of the parties, where we were all kind of lying around, coming down, and feeling like we were melting into the floor. There was a certain side of me that came out through those experiences which I channelled into 'Sheet One' and what came afterwards."

Hawtin conjured up a similar sense of magic with 'Musik' in 1994, the album further crystallising the Plastikman sonic identity with more emotive and contemplative acid tracks. The downtempo electro cut 'Plastique' was the centrepiece, with its interlacing 303 lines and crisp drums, while 'Lasttrak' added ethereal pads to a squiggling riff and 'Marbles' was profoundly repetitive, an update on the innovations of Phuture's 'Acid Tracks'. There were surprises as well, like the funky bass and hand percussion of 'Ethnik' and the warping didgeridoo synth that drove 'Outbak'.

"Plastikman was always rhythmic and it had acidity and sometimes intensity, but then it also had this storytelling, this dynamic," says Hawtin, in summation of his archetypal sound. "That dynamic is in every album. Rhythm is an important factor, but so is flow and timing, how I'm hearing things and feeling things. It's all part of the journey, part of what's embedded into the Plastikman personality."

'Sheet One' and 'Musik' propelled Hawtin into the full glare of the limelight. Plastikman logo T-shirts were everywhere in the mid-90s and plenty of techno heads tried to emulate Hawtin's shaven-headed, bespectacled, slightly otherworldly lab technician look. Plastikman was suddenly in demand as the remixer du jour too, overhauling tracks by X-Press 2, Hardfloor, La Funk Mob and lots more.

Despite their underground nature, his albums were extraordinarily popular, in part thanks to their melodic nous, but also due to their sense of mystery.

"Those records play with you, giving you a hook and bringing you in, and then releasing it and going deeper than you would have expected," explains Hawtin. "There's definitely something there with the intimacy, the beauty, the catchiness of just the 303. If you let that machine be kind of pure and you don't over-process it, it's such a beautiful sound."

The success of 'Sheet One' and 'Musik' resulted in a dilemma for the artist, though. On the brink of a mainstream breakthrough, Hawtin knew he could capitalise on this by producing more commercial material, but he hated the idea of compromising his art.

"I felt a bit painted into the corner after 'Musik'," he says. "It felt like there was this pressure… I'm not saying a pressure from the record company, but maybe internally. It was like, 'OK, everything is expanding now, so do I make a third album and try to become a main stage performer?'."

In the end, a life-changing event forced his hand. On 19 April 1995, a domestic terror attack in Oklahoma City by white supremacist Timothy McVeigh killed 168 people. The day after, Hawtin was driving from his home in Canada to play a gig in New York accompanied by his brother, ambient musician and visual artist Matthew Hawtin, when they were pulled over by police officers suspicious of their skinhead haircuts. Without the right papers, Hawtin was detained for several hours and then ejected from the US. His girlfriend, his work, his social life, his whole focus was in Detroit, but it was 18 months before he was able to cross the border again.

"I got thrown out of America," he says. "All this shit happened and, as a result, I went more cerebral with my music again. So 'Concept 1' [a series of 12-inch singles issued over the course of 12 months] was this year-long project where I didn't allow myself to use a 303 or many of my other machines. That enabled me to experiment with extreme minimalism, leaning a lot on effects rather than sounds.

"Those ideas then transferred into the Plastikman sessions. 'Concept 1' was made in 1996 and it was September 1997 when I went into the 'Consumed' sessions. I was taking everything I had learned from 'Concept 1' and saying, 'OK, now I can allow the 303s to come back into the mix, but keep them at a distance so we don't go straight back into 'Sheet One' and 'Musik' territory'."

'Consumed' felt like the onset of a new Plastikman phase and a new period in Hawtin's life in general. He and John Acquaviva put Plus 8 on hold and Hawtin launched another label, Minus, usually styled as M_nus or M-nus. Everything, he claims, was about stripping things down to their core elements.

"I was just trying to find a way to make a Hawtin record without falling into those same traps," he says. "I also felt quite uninspired by the techno that was coming out at that point. It was very hard to find good stuff and there were a lot of copycats. After seven or eight years of touring, I was like, 'Man, is this it?'. That pushed me to innovate more and reduce further. My challenge was, 'Can I make a Plastikman record with 303s, but try to make the 303s disappear as much as possible?'."

This period initiated a modern minimal direction that has come to define Hawtin's art. Finding a fresh lease of life when he moved to Berlin in 2003, he released the album 'Closer', kicked M_nus into gear, and threw himself into the city's club scene. His look changed and his DJing style became more futuristic, inspired by the technological advances of the day. In 2005, he released the momentous 'DE9 | Transitions' mix CD, which saw him slicing snippets of more than 100 tracks into loops and merging them together into a novel work with the aid of pioneering software. Hailed by both the dance press and mainstream music publications as a masterpiece, it was the first DJ mix of its kind.

Hawtin championed upcoming producers like Magda, Troy Pierce, Marc Houle, Gaiser and Loco Dice with releases on M_nus. At the same time, his DJ bookings went through the roof. By the mid-2000s, the minimal techno style he'd helped to shape was the dominant club sound and Hawtin became a superstar, headlining Sven Väth's massive Cocoon club nights at Amnesia in Ibiza, before starting his own ENTER. events at the island's historic Space venue in 2012. Despite his best efforts to remain in the shadows, it seemed impossible for Hawtin to evade the public eye.

But it wasn't long before his Plastikman alter ego beckoned again and in 2014 he released 'EX', his first album in 11 years. A collection of tracks recorded in a single session at the Guggenheim Museum, it merged the acidity of his earlier material with the sleek aesthetic that marks his later work. Hawtin put the melodic 303s back upfront, while tunes like 'EXtrude', with its ominous synth pads, growling bass tones and tough beats, showed he'd lost none of his fire.

"After I landed in Berlin, it was several years of partying and growing M_nus and just DJing," says Hawtin. "It was so intense. There was no room to do much of my own music. I was loving playing everyone else's stuff, loving leading all the A&R of the label, loving helping new artists come up… that was so fresh and exciting.

"By 2014, some of the M_nus structure was changing and some of it was crumbling. I was like, 'OK, was it wrong to put my producer career on hold while I was incubating and helping everybody else?'. So the album 'EX' was very introspective and a bit sad because things were adjusting – relationships and friendships. When I'm in that kind of emotional state, I usually find a lot of comfort in the studio with my machines."

Back in the here and now, Hawtin is excited about the release of 'Consumed In Key' and is weighing up how it's being received by fans. Plastikman and Chilly Gonzales seem to be such a natural fit on this record that it raises the question of whether they might join forces again in the future.

"It's the best I could have hoped for with this type of work," declares Hawtin. "So where do you go from there? The whole experience was inspiring and challenging… and I think right now we need to just enjoy the outcome of this wonderful opportunity that Chilly started."

"You can't compare it to the usual collaborations," adds Gonzales. "As Richie said, now is the moment we can finally sit back and say, 'Oh wow, this is why we went through all that, this is why it was so epic'."

"I think our next collaboration is having dinner and a glass of wine together, which we still haven't done after making this album for one-and-a-half years," grins Hawtin.

What is certain is there will be more Plastikman material to come. Hawtin says being back in the studio recently has been important to his sense of well-being.

"The only thing I wanted during Covid was to be surrounded by music projects," he notes. "To learn and to keep learning in the studio. 'Consumed In Key' has taken me back into my past and then on into the future, because I had to learn different techniques and understand working with acoustic instruments when I was mixing. It really took me back into that cerebral mind of Hawtin. I'm in there now and I want to try to continue living there for a while. I want to see where that takes me again."

Ultimately, Plastikman is the place and persona where Richie Hawtin feels most himself, which is probably why his records continue to resonate so many years after their creation.

"It's a very personal project," he concludes. "I always say that Plastikman is much closer to the real Hawtin than what you get when I'm onstage. I've grown into that extrovert DJ personality, but Plastikman is me. It's me, exactly here, in the studio. When you feel that, you have to follow where it takes you."

'Consumed In Key' is out now on Turbo

PLAY STIKMAN AND CHILLY GONZALES

HAWTIN HIGH POINTS

From acid and bleep to techno and beyond, here are some of our favourite Richie Hawtin releases of the last three decades...

WORDS: FAT ROLAND

F.U.S.E.

Approach And Identify

PLUS 8 12-INCH, 1990

Growing up in Windsor, Canada's southernmost city and a stone's throw across the river from Detroit, Richie Hawtin spent his youth plugged into the underground techno pumped out by the Motor City's radio stations. By the end of his teenage years, he'd produced an impressive bleep track, 'Approach And Identify', which he released under the name F.U.S.E. on Plus 8, a label he started with his DJ pal John Acquaviva. Its expansive take on techno could easily have slotted into the Warp roster, so it was no surprise when F.U.S.E.'s debut album, 'Dimension Intrusion', appeared on Warp. The sci-fi feel of 'Approach And Identify' was deeply zeitgeisty too, the lead sample being Lara Lindsay's computer voice in the 1976 film 'Logan's Run'. "There had to be a story or something that was more immersive or trippy," said Hawtin of his otherworldly influences.

0733

Record Bass Story

PROBE 12-INCH, 1991

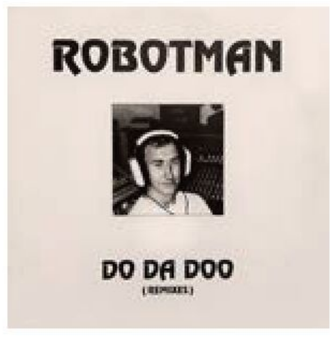
Hawtin and Acquaviva set up Plus 8 in May 1990 and launched two sub-labels, Probe and Definitive, within a year. Their first UK signing was 0733, otherwise known as Shades Of Rhythm collaborator Casey Tucker. The forward-thinking 'Record Bass Story' appeared on Probe and the B-side was engineered to reverse the lateral direction of the needle. It was an unashamedly uptempo track, with splashes of acid and a euphoric breakdown custom-built for Ibiza sunrises. While Tucker was the driving force for this 12-inch – 0733 was then the telephone area code of his home town of Peterborough, a place perhaps better known for giving us Erasure's Andy Bell – this was a glorious display of Hawtin's early production skills and his ability to spot talent.

UP!

Spiritual High

PROBE 12-INCH, 1992

You'll probably recognise the insistent cymbal stomp of 'Spiritual High'. The track appeared on Warp's first 'Artificial Intelligence' compilation (alongside the likes of Autechre and Speedy J) and is something of an anomaly on that album, its delirious drones far less subtle than the usual introspection of the armchair techno scene. It was recorded at Hawtin's parents' house using the same set-up he utilised for Plastikman's influential 'Sheet One' album. The centre label of the Up! record credits UTK, which was short for Under The Kitchen, the location of a storage room that doubled as his studio. Despite these domestic overtones, 'Spiritual High' proved to be perfect dancefloor fodder on the international underground scene and was part of Hawtin's set when performing Stateside with Daniel Bell, his partner in Cybersonik.



ROBOTMAN

Do Da Doo (Remixes)

DEFINITIVE/NOVAMUTE 12-INCH, 1993

Hawtin's family moved to Canada from the UK when he was nine years old. His father, a big krautrock fan, took up a post as a robotic technician for General Motors, which later gave rise to Hawtin's much overlooked Robotman pseudonym. The original version of 'Do Da Doo', a somewhat naive 909-heavy house cut led by nonsensical vocal blaps, appeared on the B-side of his 'Never' 12-inch, with this EP of four remixes following soon after and further reworkings coming out on NovaMute in 1994. The track's android attitude was no doubt influenced by the 'Metropolis' movie poster pinned up in UTK. "I put my dad on the cover, because he was always robot man," said Hawtin, who even adopted a Robotman persona in interviews, predating Daft Punk's helmeted aliases by some years.

HARDTRAX

Hardphunk

PROBE 12-INCH, 1994

They're not the most famous siblings in techno – that accolade obviously goes to the headlamp-clad Hartnolls in Orbital – but Hawtin's occasional collaborations with his graphic artist brother Matthew added a valuable visual element to his career. When they were growing up, the pair would visit art galleries to see Mark Rothko paintings by day and watch Jeff Mills DJing in local clubs by night. Billed as a Hard Brothers production, Hardtrax's 'Hardphunk' was one of their earliest works. Notable for its scuffed, steely style, it preceded the similarly themed tracks 'Cowboyphunk', 'Elektrophunk' and 'Shufflephunk'. The Hawtins later contributed music and graphics to the Art Basel art fair in Miami Beach and last year revived the F.U.S.E. project for an ever-morphing NFT-based audio-visual composite that lives on the blockchain.

CONCEPT 1

Concept 1: 01:96 – 12:96

CONCEPT 1 12-INCH SERIES, 1996

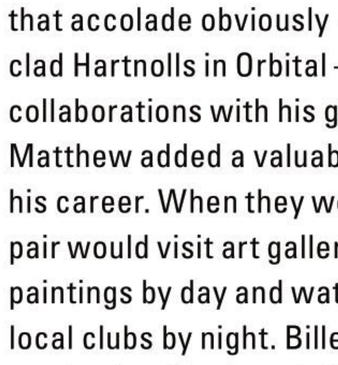
In 1995, after his first tranche of success as Plastikman, Hawtin was thrown out of the US for visa infractions. He found himself exiled in Windsor, on the wrong side of the Detroit River, so close yet so far away from the scene that had made his name. "It was like cutting the umbilical cord," he said. In response, he set himself a new challenge, 'Concept 1', a series of 12 12-inch singles released over the course of 1996 that rebooted his sound in a much starker style. He even waited until the stroke of midnight on New Year's Eve 1995 before starting work on the first track, which was appropriately titled with the timecode '1:00'. Dedicated followers who subscribed for the full 12 months received a special vinyl collector's storage box.

PLASTIKMAN

Artifakts (bc)

M_NUS/NOVAMUTE ALBUM, 1998

Plastikman's third album was supposed to have been 'Klinik', but it was abandoned after Hawtin felt the foundations of the second wave of Detroit techno shifting beneath his feet. With Plus 8 on hiatus, he set up another label, M_nus, stating that his mission was to "slow it down and try new things". And that's exactly what he did. The discarded bleeps and beats of 'Klinik' eventually coalesced into two Plastikman albums in quick succession, 'Consumed' and 'Artifakts (bc)', both of which were released in 1998. 'Artifakts (bc)' boasts the totemic 'Rekall', a spacious ambient electro workout with the most glacial acid filter ever committed to record. Weighing in at 11 minutes long, this exquisite expression of Hawtin's newly slowed-down aesthetic might just be his best tune.

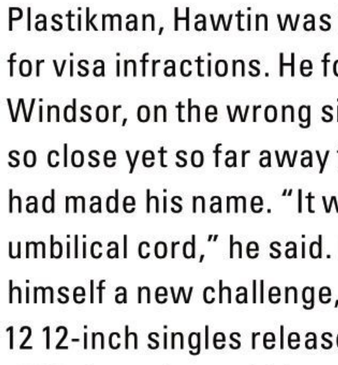


RICHIE HAWTIN

DE9 | Transitions

M_NUS/NOVAMUTE ALBUM, 2005

Hawtin spent the first years of the new millennium honing his DJ skills. In 1999, he released 'Decks, EFX & 909', an album that brought the Roland TR-909 drum machine to the heart of his DJ set-up. 'DE9 | Closer To The Edit' followed in 2001 and featured 120 locked grooves, ideally to be used with the stylus-sensing DJ tool Final Scratch, which had been developed with the help of Hawtin and Acquaviva. But it's the third and final 'DE9' album that gets our attention here. 'DE9 | Transitions' used Ableton Live to spiralise the likes of Carl Craig and Ricardo Villalobos into a spaghetti of tangled layers. The tracklisting is bewildering, with 340 segments making up 28 patchworked tracks on the expanded DVD version, albeit many of them repeated as they weave in and out of the mix. Next-level DJing and all in 5.1 surround sound.



PLASTIKMAN

EX Club Mixes EP

MUTE 12-INCH, 2015

Following a decade-long pause, Plastikman returned in grand style with 2014's 'EX' album. Recorded at New York's Guggenheim Museum, complete with an epic sound system and a gigantic glowing digital monolith, it received muted reviews despite being nominated for Electronic Album of the Year at the Juno Awards. It was beaten by Caribou's 'Our Love'. Still, it gave us the 'EX Club Mixes' EP the following year, possibly the best offshoot of Hawtin's career. The record features four Plastikman reworkings by Dubfire, Dixon, Tale Of Us and Recondite. The latter's remix of 'EXplore' is incredible, the German ambient musician turning the piece into an open-hearted and dynamic techno stormer that sounds like Higher Intelligence Agency going to war with Jon Hopkins. In a good way.

GRIMES

Darkseid (Richie Hawtin Remix)

4AD DOWNLOAD, 2021

While 2021 saw some superbly corrugated 303 work on his 'Acid King' EP, perhaps Hawtin's most interesting recent track is his overhaul of a 2020 single from Grimes and 潘PAN. The smoky trip hop of the original 'Darkseid', dominated by 潘PAN's breathlessly auto-tuned rap, is pulled taut into a no-nonsense bass stomp and the result is pulsating, pulverising and purist. Hawtin and Grimes have history, by the way. She performed with him at his Sake Bar residency at Space in Ibiza in 2012, but then turned down his ALS Ice Bucket Challenge nomination in 2014, citing the ALS Association's animal testing policy as a reason. They have remained friends, however, and this remix is a terrific match, the rolling drum machines and building intensity an excellent encapsulation of Richie Hawtin's three decades at the top of the techno tree.

DUEL PURPOSE

After years of band tensions and failed reunions, Propaganda's Claudia Brücken and Susanne Freytag have resurfaced as xPropaganda with a shimmering new album, 'The Heart Is Strange'. Here, they talk ZTT, camaraderie and the fear of following up 1985's defining 'A Secret Wish'

WORDS: SHARON O'CONNELL
PICTURES: KAI FREYTAG

By any measure, 37 years is a long time between albums. So long that you'd imagine recording a follow-up with the same personnel would be fraught with difficulties and pretty much impossible. For Propaganda though, it was the exact opposite. Almost four decades after the release of their defining 1985 debut, 'A Secret Wish', singer-songwriters Claudia Brücken and Susanne Freytag have reconvened with producer and guitarist Stephen Lipson as xPropaganda to produce a new record, 'The Heart Is Strange'.

The process has been an unpressured and enjoyable one, by all accounts. Mainly because there was no actual plan to make an album at all. 'A Secret Wish' was reissued in 2018 and, to mark the occasion, Brücken and Freytag performed it in its entirety over two nights at London venue The Garage, with a line-up that included Lipson. In rehearsals, they found themselves playing B-sides and extended versions and quickly realised they needed more songs to flesh out the set. The pair asked Lipson to work with them on new material. Ideas flowed easily, and quite soon they found that they'd written enough songs for a long-player.

"It wasn't, 'This is the year where we now write a new xPropaganda/ Propaganda album'," explains Brücken, speaking from her London home. "It wasn't planned that way – it was very natural. We wrote four songs and it was really good fun, so we just thought, 'Well, why don't we continue?', and then it sort of evolved. Susanne and I had tried to revive Propaganda several times with Ralf [Dörper] and Michael [Mertens], so it was like a continuation of us trying to get this off the ground. Then these shows came about and out of them a new shape of Propaganda started."

There's a great deal of history underpinning xPropaganda and, rather like an iceberg, much of it is hidden. The band have their own identity, as does 'The Heart Is Strange', but both are necessarily entwined with 'A Secret Wish' and Trevor Horn's era-defining label ZTT, which has been reactivated especially for the new release.

The backstory is messy and somewhat troubled, involving a protracted legal battle with the label and subsequent out-of-court settlement, a second incarnation of Propaganda (Mertens, US singer Betsi Miller and two former members of Simple Minds – Derek Forbes and Brian McGee), their 1990 album '1234' and, later that decade, a failed attempt to reunite Brücken, Freytag and Mertens. All of which makes the women's faith that a "new" Propaganda would work this time around slightly surprising.

"The first word that comes to mind for me is camaraderie," says Brücken, describing the relationship between the current members. "A feeling of the right people, respect, everybody having their job to do and just a really good time. No egos, please!"

Still something of a sore point nearly 40 years on, the same issue saw Freytag walk away from the 90s iteration of the group well before '1234' was finished. Joining the chat from Berlin, she recalls the friction vividly.

"Things happened among the band members, and I decided I didn't really want anything to do with it," says Freytag. "When they started working on '1234' – and it took a long time – I became a little bit more sentimental. They asked me to be part of one song and I thought, 'Okay, I'll do it'.

"But it wasn't the Propaganda I knew. I wasn't happy that there was a very clear distinction between male and female roles. I don't want to go into more detail but it was, 'You do this, we do that'. And I thought, 'You know what? Pfft'. I got up and left the room, and that was it. So 'Don't (You Mess With Me)' from the xPropaganda album was a nice little answer to it."

Brücken, who quit Propaganda in 1987 (but remained signed to ZTT) and formed Act with Thomas Leer the following year, shares this view.

"It was always an issue, I'm afraid. We can't pretend it wasn't. I didn't feel very valued at that time and Susanne had the same experience after I'd left."

The situation was infinitely better in 2017, when work on new material for the 'A Secret Wish' shows began. Also on the team was writer and producer John Williams, who'd worked with Brücken on her 2014 solo album 'Where Else…'. Brücken likens their whole lyric-writing process to a game of catch.

"Throwing balls, catching balls and going, 'Nope, that doesn't sound right'. The word has to match the melody you're singing, so sometimes, even if it would have been a great word, if it didn't sing well we'd go, 'No'.

"It was a long process. We'd meet up at least twice a week and work from 10am to 6pm, only on words – it was a real discipline. Once we had the melody and the words, we would record it all, so by the end of the day Stephen would have everything there to fiddle with."

Those lyrics range across the many facets of love and romance – among them regret, desire and dependency – but there's political comment, too. 'The Wolves Are Returning' addresses the resurgence of the far right ("When history repeats, must we take it in our stride?"), while album closer 'Ribbons Of Steel' is more personal, confronting German history with its reference to the Berlin Wall.

What's perhaps most striking about 'The Heart Is Strange' is that although it's instantly identifiable as Propaganda – there's the dark glamour, sadness and icy drama, the interplay between Brücken and Freytag's voices, as well as their individual potency – it's definitely not just 'A Secret Wish' part two. Which is creditable, considering the success of that debut and the current widespread appetite for 80s nostalgia.

"I think we were aware of the 'second album' fear," admits Freytag. "But 'A Secret Wish' was such a long time ago. We're different people now. The whole studio set-up is very different. So we decided to say, 'Okay, we do what we enjoy doing', because part of it, of course, is connected to Propaganda – part of the band are the same people – but there has been a lot happening in between. Even if we wanted to, I don't think we could make completely the same album."

When Stephen Lipson speaks to me a few days later from his home in the Cotswolds, he concurs with the "that was then, this now" attitude towards 'The Heart Is Strange'.

"Honestly, I didn't think about anything other than being in the moment," he admits. "Which probably means I'm an old fart."

He cheerfully confirms the almost accidental nature of how the whole endeavour came about.

"It wasn't as if we actively decided to do a follow-up – nothing like that at all. It was just messing about. John Williams had a whole bunch of ideas, and then we suddenly realised we had the basis of an album. Everyone kept saying, 'Eight tracks aren't enough', but I hate long albums. I've really got no interest in doing 16 songs, or whatever – those days have passed now. So we made it. And I'm not going to blow smoke up my own backside, but it sounded pretty good.

"I have had literally no expectations for this. It was done to give Claudia and Susanne something to play live. That was the main event. We've done that. And I never, ever thought we'd get a record deal, but we have."

The "x" that's now in Propaganda's name lends an enigmatic air to the original (which itself seems newly resonant in light of the epidemic of fake news), updating it from its initial Cold War/Eastern Bloc associations. However, it was added simply to avoid further wrangling with Dörper and Mertens over the old band moniker.

Freytag describes trying to get permission to use the name as "a long, long process – many discussions and emails".

"We always had the question of, 'What are you doing with the name?'" she continues. "'Are you doing something? Are we doing something?' And then we thought it would be nice to show it has roots in the old project, but it is a new project. That's why the 'x' is in front of it. The difficulty was also with the English and the German copyright name and legalities – different countries and laws. We never really knew where we were, so the new name was a kind of compromise."

"It was a struggle," expounds Brücken. "We went to them and said, 'Look, you haven't done anything with the name for so long, so is it alright if we have it?'. And it was a complete 'No'. It was quite heavy. It's different for me because I was blamed for loads of things that happened in the past and I've never heard the end of it."

One of those things, says Brücken, was the claim she wanted to leave the group in the 80s to launch her solo career.

"That was never the case – I just wanted to stay with ZTT. I really loved being in Propaganda but the others decided they didn't want to stay with the label anymore. I was put in an awkward position because I was freshly married to Paul Morley, who was one of ZTT's co-founders, so it was extremely difficult.

"My heart was very much with the band but I also loved the ZTT sound and working with the people. It was a real conundrum for me. Everyone seems to have a different truth, so there are loads of versions out there, but I feel as if I've always been made an easy scapegoat for all the things that went wrong.

"I really enjoy working with people who appreciate what you're doing," she adds. "The people who work on this new shape of Propaganda have loads of respect for one another and we are also very fond of each other. So I'm far happier with that."

'The Heart Is Strange' will also be available as a deluxe edition, including a complete set of instrumental versions. It's a format that heightens the panoramic drama of the songs, with their understated yearning for something forever out of reach – whether that's in the past or the future, it's intriguingly hard to tell.

For Brücken, Freytag and Lipson alike, there's a pleasing symmetry to the record's release on ZTT, given their 1985 debut became emblematic of the label – although they struggle to immediately define what it represents.

"I suppose boutique quality," offers Lipson. "Beyond that, the things I was working on for ZTT were very disparate. But whether it was a hit or not, it was all pretty good, and that stemmed from Trevor Horn's work ethic. At the time, Stock Aitken Waterman were happening, and I remember we'd talk about how different everything was, how they were a factory that churned things out in two days or whatever, while we'd be agonising over a bass part for three months."

Brücken identifies the distinctive elements of their singular sound.

"The cinematic landscape and that kind of underlying continental or German colour," she says. "And the contrast in voices but also this very cold, dark synth music in combination with organic instruments such as trumpets or guitars. For me, it's always been a sort of theatre. What I like about it in particular is the way Stephen approaches his music. It leaves the listener to project their own associations and emotional ideas."

"It's definitely the theatrical drama and, of course, the 80s when we grew up in Germany," adds Freytag. "Also, Hildegard Knef and German chanson singers, who are very much in our DNA. I think Claudia has very often been compared to Marlene Dietrich, and for me it's Greta Garbo."

All this talk about their music's cinematic scope and theatrical drama suggests Brücken and Freytag might like to try their hand at writing for film.

"Yes, we would!" enthuses Freytag. "It would be fantastic."

"I think I could do it, too," adds Brücken. "When I see all these Netflix series with their palettes of music, I go, 'Oh, this sounds right up my street'. One could really experiment with that."

The xPropaganda call has gone out – movie producers, take note.

'The Heart Is Strange' is released by ZTT/UMC on 20 May

WARTS AND ALL

Adam Cresswell is Rodney Cromwell. Previously, he's been Arthur from Arthur And Martha, a founder member of Saloon, and a man whose life was changed by a shattered jar of pickled onions

WORDS: BOB FISCHER
PICTURES: ALISON AHERN

"I used to deliver pickled onions to chip shops," recalls Adam Cresswell, his face still betraying a trace of residual trauma. "They gave me a new car and filled it with pickled eggs, pickled onions and chip fat. I was driving on the back route to Brighton, listening to James Brown really loud, when another car came at me. I swerved out of the way, lost control and ended up in a ditch. One wheel was stuck in a tree, and I couldn't get out. I had to open the sunroof and climb through it, and another driver came over to help. He said, 'Are you alright, mate? You're bleeding…', and when I looked down, I was covered in juice from the pickled onions. That's when I decided to move to Reading and form my first band."

Life's all about these little turning points, and the curious meanderings of Adam Cresswell have zig-zagged in the most intriguing fashion – from death-defying pickled-onion courier to cult success with Peel favourites Saloon and via seminal "tweetronica" duo Arthur And Martha to his latest musical incarnation, Rodney Cromwell.

The first Cromwell album, 2015's 'Age Of Anxiety' – released on his own Happy Robots label – was bedroom synthpop with a troubled edge. The follow-up, 2022's 'Memory Box', is woozier and more psychedelic, with occasional detours into Eno-esque fuzziness. It happened as the result of another landmark moment for him – he was an early Covid adopter, contracting it in March 2020.

"It gave me brain fog," he explains. "It was like tripping and falling down a Kafka-esque, Alice-In-Wonderland rabbit hole. So for me, 'Memory Box' is a concept album. The first couple of tracks are standing on the edge of dystopia, then it descends into my own consciousness. It goes from hard synthpop to something more hauntological but picks itself out of the hole at the end.

"Essentially, both my Rodney Cromwell albums have been about illness. The first was me dealing with my own anxiety and this one is about Covid. I had a feeling of, 'Am I going to die?'. And then I wasn't dead, but I felt a bit different, and things had changed."

He's loquacious and funny, a deadpan raconteur par excellence. So why the invented persona, I wonder? Why did Adam Cresswell become Rodney Cromwell? He pauses…

"Originally he was just a pseudonym. I didn't want people at work to know what I get up to in my spare time. So I did it as Rodney Cromwell, a name Matt from Saloon had given me years back, because I always used to get people's names wrong.

"But then I supported a band called Massive Ego, who were all in wigs, make-up and leather, and I thought, 'How am I going to compete with this?'. So I went onstage in a woolly hat with a Sainsbury's bag, hooked the bag over the microphone stand and took out a little toy music box. I wound the handle and it played 'The Internationale'. And that was really the moment Rodney Cromwell was born. He's a geekier extension of me. I'm a bald, middle-aged man and I'm never going to be cool. So I thought I'd go the other way."

Cresswell grew up in Maidstone, 30 miles south-east of London. It has mill ponds, a museum of horse-drawn carriages and a football team that plays in the National League South. But when I suggest his love of dystopian 1980s synthpop may have been forged as an antidote to such leafy ennui, he bristles slightly.

"Everyone seems to think I sit at home listening to Gary Numan all the time," he protests. "I don't mind a bit of Numan, but the first synth record I remember hearing was 'I Feel Love' on 'Tiswas'. New Order's 'True Faith' was the record that actually converted me. I had my own telly from the age of 12, and when Charles and Diana got married my parents won a video recorder at a local service station. I used it to tape Derek Jarman movies from Channel 4. So when I saw the 'True Faith' video, it appealed to that love of weird arty stuff. I was a pretentious, precocious teenager."

With a love of scratchy indie as well, I presume? Everything Cresswell has done has a whiff of C86 about it. That under-celebrated hinterland between The Smiths and Britpop. Small-town music collectives, pints of crap cider, gigs in freezing pub backrooms. Boys in cagoules and girls with pink hair bobbles.

"I do like a bit of indie, but there weren't really any bands passing through Maidstone at that point," he says. "I moved to Reading because I thought there'd be lots of gigs going on there. I used to follow Gorky's Zygotic Mynci and Broadcast.

THE ROGUE
CONTROLLERS
MODULATION
OSCILLATORS

"And then I hung around the jingly-jangly guitar guys when I was in Saloon because we were signed to Track & Field. We pretended not to like indie pop but we sounded exactly like Belle And Sebastian. *Obviously* we pretended to hate them."

Saloon were formed in 1997, and Cresswell has a vivid recollection of how it all unfolded.

"I remember me and Mike Smoughton – my best mate – went to see 'Austin Powers' at the cinema in Reading. Afterwards he said, 'What are you going to do with yourself now you're here?', and I said, 'I'm going to form a band'. And he said, 'I'll join!'.

"So we went around the bar, looking for a woman in a rollneck jumper to be our Trish Keenan. We didn't find anyone, but we did end up poaching Alison Cotton, who was playing with British Air Powers before they became British Sea Power. And Matt Ashton, who was working in Tesco and *did* actually turn up in a rollneck jumper."

With singer Amanda Gomez providing mellifluous vocals, the band's spiky art-pop soon attracted the attention of John Peel.

"We sent him our first demo cassette of four tracks," says Cresswell. "And about six months later it came back in the post and he'd written, 'Not my cup of tea' on it. We were mortified. Then the next day he played our first proper single, 'Futurismo', on his show. And then every single record we released after that. But it all soured after we were voted Number One in the Festive 50."

Ah, yes. With two coveted Peel Sessions already under their belts, Saloon had amassed a vociferous following. And, not unreasonably, they rallied their faithful to vote in Peel's traditional Christmas countdown of listeners' favourites for 2002.

"When we formed, my brother told us, 'You need a website', but I didn't even know what a website was, so he set one up," says Cresswell. "If an email came to us, he'd print it out and fax it to me at work. And I'd write my answer and fax it back to him so he could reply.

"Then he started a mailing list, and we'd hand out cards to people whenever we played. It became a very long list. Our big number at the end of gigs was 'Girls Are The New Boys'. And when our album came out, Peel played that a few times. The previous year, our song 'Impact' had got to Number 12 in the Festive 50 without us doing anything, so I sent an email to our fanbase saying, 'Maybe you'd like to vote for 'Girls Are The New Boys'? Or vote for someone else instead… we really like Herman Dune'.

"I sent it, forgot about it, then the Festive 50 was played out. And blimey, we were Number One. And it was brilliant… for around half an hour. But the Lambrusco hadn't even gone down before I went on the Peel forum and it was all, 'URGH, WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE?', 'NEVER 'EARD OF 'EM', 'WANKERS', 'CHEATS!'. So we'd gone from being the plucky underdogs to the band people hated, because we'd beaten The White Stripes. And it ruined things for us. It soured things within the band."

Was this another turning point for Cresswell? It sounds like the experience left a profound impression.

"It did a bit, certainly for me. That's where my anxiety started. I didn't even know what anxiety *was* before then."

The deadpan raconteur with tales of life-changing pickled onions has vanished. This is serious stuff.

"I couldn't travel," says Cresswell. "I couldn't get on the Tube or anything. I still don't use the Blackwall Tunnel. I hate it. Which, living in Catford, makes life quite hard. I did a gig where I was really late because I wouldn't use it, and I had to go all over east London and Tower Bridge."

Saloon announced their demise in October 2004, five days after Peel's death. Cresswell concedes it "wasn't the nicest of splits" and admits he contemplated quitting music completely until the timely intervention of enthusiastic Leeds promoter Alice Hubley.

"Alice talked me into doing something," he smiles. "She moved to London and pulled me together. I met her when we were touring and we got on well. She was very chatty and we started hanging out. I had a couple of Saloon songs left over and we just put a set together.

"Most labels wanted digital-only releases then, but we wanted to put records out… so that's when the Happy Robots label started."

Adam and Alice became Arthur And Martha. They made one album proper, 2009's 'Navigation', and it's great – Casio-powered slices of low-octane pottering performed by a duo who look like they're about to embark on a 1950s camping holiday. It's that C86 aesthetic again. There's one publicity photo, I tell him, that makes my teeth tingle. Cresswell is on a park bench wearing beige knee socks and C&A shorts. It's one of the most coolly uncool things I've ever seen.

"That was Peter and Jane grown up!" he exclaims. "You know, from the Ladybird books. I remember a style magazine phoning up saying, 'We want to do a photoshoot with you', and we were at a Gilbert & George exhibition at the time. So it all just tallied. Peter and Jane, Gilbert & George… we wanted to be the classic two-piece synth band with that eccentric British vibe."

You were described by The Guardian as "tweetronica". Do you concede to being twee? Or have you come to hate the word?

"I've grown to accept it. Twee is fine!" he laughs. "We *were* twee. You can't dress like Peter and Jane and say you're not."

It's a fascinating chat and Cresswell is refreshingly open. There's light and shade in equal measure. Turning points galore. The profound and the mundane, all mixed together.

"The Arthur And Martha album was fun, but it was a really hard time for us," he continues. "We lost several loved ones while making it, and the day before we released it, I was in hospital with my mum when she died. So we literally just put it out – to mostly good reviews. And one annoyingly horrible one in the NME. I was at my dad's, and I thought 'I'll pick up the NME. That'll cheer me up.'

And then came another hiatus.

"I'd had enough, and I had other things I wanted to do. Have children and decorate. Even now, I have to take Happy Robots sabbaticals."

There is, I suggest, a retro quality to almost everything he does. The vintage synths. The Ladybird homages. And the fact that some of his label's roster could have stepped straight from a Blake Edwards film. There's lounge lizard Roman Angelos, making 1960s muzak in a skinny suit. Hologram Teen, the disco-fuelled project of former Stereolab keyboardist Morgane Lhote. And the hippy, folk-horror stylings of Martha herself, now restyled as Alice Hubble. Is he a nostalgic person, pining for his pre-anxiety 1970s childhood?

"Not as much as you!" he laughs. "I've got a few vintage 'Star Wars' figures, but I don't spend ages listening to old music. And I'm not a snob who doesn't like modern pop. I'll happily listen to Lady Gaga or AURORA."

My relationship with nostalgia, I tell him, is slightly double-edged. I love ferreting around in the weird little corners of the past, but I definitely don't want it all back. I'm not desperate for it to magically become 1978 again. I'm happy to live in 2022.

"I'd probably rather it was 1997, when it felt like world peace was achievable," he smiles. "I remember being at Tutu's club with Mike when the Labour government had just got in, looking out over the Thames and thinking, 'This is the most exciting time of our lives'. It didn't last that long, but looking back they were the best times we've ever had. But no, I don't think of myself as a nostalgic person… or at least I don't *define* myself as that."

Nevertheless, the cover of 'Memory Box' boasts a faded depiction of Mnemosyne, the Greek goddess of memory, and the music might be the closest Adam Cresswell has come to emulating the drowsy, dreamlike wistfulness of his beloved Broadcast.

"Your memory box, like a play-pit of sand / Meanings blow in the breeze, so I can't understand", he chants softly on the title track, almost audibly sinking into broken afternoon sleep. 'Butterflies In The Filing Cabinet', meanwhile, features hissy, 30-year-old recordings of his brother Dom, practising his multiplication tables for school. It's a terrific album – and it all stems from a damaged jar of pickled onions. You just never know where these little turning points will take you.

"True. Although I can't listen to James Brown anymore…"

'Memory Box' is out now on Happy Robots

BEAK PERFORMANCE

Descended from the esteemed Penguin Cafe Orchestra – founded by the incomparable Simon Jeffes – Penguin Cafe's Arthur Jeffes reflects on his father's legacy, making music on his own terms and being endorsed by Kraftwerk

WORDS: STEPHEN DALTON
PICTURES: ALEX KOZOBOLIS

A balmy night in March 2022, deep in the bowels of the Barbican – London's towering concrete culture bunker. As penguin masks dangle precariously from the walls, Arthur Jeffes perches at his grand piano to begin an evening of impeccably suave instrumental chamber music, combining avant-classical zing, rootsy twang and analogue drone.

This is the first British concert in more than two years by Penguin Cafe, the free-thinking ensemble created by Arthur in 2009 to build on the musical heritage of his late father, the composer Simon Jeffes, founder and driving force behind the Penguin Cafe Orchestra. The Barbican set mainly consists of tracks from Penguin Cafe's 2011 debut album, 'A Matter Of Life…', covering a broad stylistic sweep from the Philip Glass-style ripples of 'Landau' to acoustic glitch-folk gem 'Sundog' and the mournful ambient moodscape of 'Coriolis'.

Like the original PCO, Penguin Cafe tap into a very British strain of avant-garde sensibility, manicured and mild-mannered, tinged with cricket-pavilion whimsy and Python-esque surrealism. Parts of this show conjure up a lost England of eccentric inventors, radiophonic workshops and garden-shed arts labs.

It may sound a little genteel to ears more accustomed to the noisy end of cutting-edge electronica, but this celebratory gathering is taking place under some very heavy storm clouds, with Covid resurgent and horrific revelations emerging from Russia's invasion of Ukraine. All of which lends extra emotional charge to the warm sense of community, connection and continuity with the past running through this performance like a fragile golden thread. Earning rapturous applause, the Penguins deliver not just lightly experimental sounds but also a precious sense of shared humanity. A welcome flicker of light in dark times.

Initially self-released, 'A Matter Of Life…' has just been newly remastered and reissued by east London's Erased Tapes, the band's current label, as part of an ongoing repackage programme that also includes some lesser-known PCO albums.

Penguin Cafe's experimental credentials were reinforced when they joined Erased Tapes – feted, of course, for its beautifully designed contemporary classical and electronica releases. The connection grew from a 2016 three-day mini-festival, also hosted by the Barbican, which was curated by German composer Nils Frahm. Erased Tapes label boss Robert Raths, aka electronic artist Ghostworker, was present too.

"We weren't looking for a label. We just did this thing at the Barbican," says Arthur. "Everyone got on very well, so it felt like a natural progression. Nils and Robert kind of grew up together, both very aware of my dad's stuff – they've got their vinyl editions and everything. There are a few people on Erased Tapes that we would very comfortably share a stage with, like Peter Broderick or Douglas Dare. And Hatis Noit – she's just amazing. For me, it feels really comfortable, because they keep a deliberately small roster so they can get everyone releasing often enough, with enough attention."

Simon Jeffes may have died in December 1997, but his exploratory spirit is very much alive in Penguin Cafe, both on stage and on record. The Barbican show features some of PCO's best-loved numbers, including the intricate yet infectiously catchy arpeggio workout 'Perpetuum Mobile' and the jaunty, whirling, much-covered drone-folk jig 'Music For A Found Harmonium', memorably described by Arthur as a "maypole banger".

Another highlight, both of this set and the album reissue, is a reworked version of 'Harry Piers' – a musical voyage around his father that the 19-year-old Arthur wrote to commemorate Simon's death from an inoperable brain tumour at the tragically young age of 48. The piece later evolved into a kind of unofficial signature tune for the successor band that Arthur would form more than a decade later.

"Harry Piers were my dad's two middle names," he explains. "I originally wrote it for his memorial service back in 1998 or whenever it was. I've played it probably hundreds of times since we recorded it in 2011, and it changes and develops every time, so it made sense to redo it. Normally I play it at the end, maybe as one of the encores. It's a very nice grounding for me. It brings everything back to remembering what the original point was of doing the whole Penguin Cafe thing."

Arthur Jeffes was raised in west London, surrounded by music, art and creative bohemian souls. Besides founding and running the Penguin Cafe Orchestra, his father Simon worked as a freelance producer and arranger, collaborating with a broad range of artists from progressive rockers Caravan and soul-pop singer Yvonne Elliman to punk icons Joe Strummer, Sid Vicious and Adam Ant. A thank-you telegram from John Cage to Simon for helping him with a New York performance piece was framed on the wall.

Emily Young, Arthur's mother, a visual artist who reportedly inspired Syd Barrett's lyrics for Pink Floyd's classic 'See Emily Play', is now a world-renowned sculptor living and working in rural Italy.

Soaking up his father's broad listening taste – spanning Abba, Erik Satie, Stockhausen, Wilson Pickett, Afropop, Cajun folk and beyond – Arthur was encouraged by his parents to follow his musical muse at home, but they warned him against financial expectations.

"In a fairly constructive, long-sighted way, I was allowed to play the piano instead of doing something I didn't want to do, like homework or chores," he laughs. "My dad said, 'Of course do music, but don't bank on it being a professional thing, because there are lots of good people who go nowhere and lots of very bad people who get all the money. You can't guarantee any of that stuff'."

The idea for the original Penguin Cafe Orchestra famously came to Simon Jeffes in a vivid dream, triggered by a severe attack of food poisoning in France in 1972. His feverish brain imagined a fantasy band fighting back against a regimented, soulless, disconnected world using randomness, spontaneity and joyfully messy human imperfection. When he and PCO co-founder, the cellist Helen Liebmann, began assembling the real band soon afterwards, free-form experimentalism was at the heart of the project. Tape loops, telephone signals, elastic bands, customised instruments and found sounds all formed part of their oblique strategies.

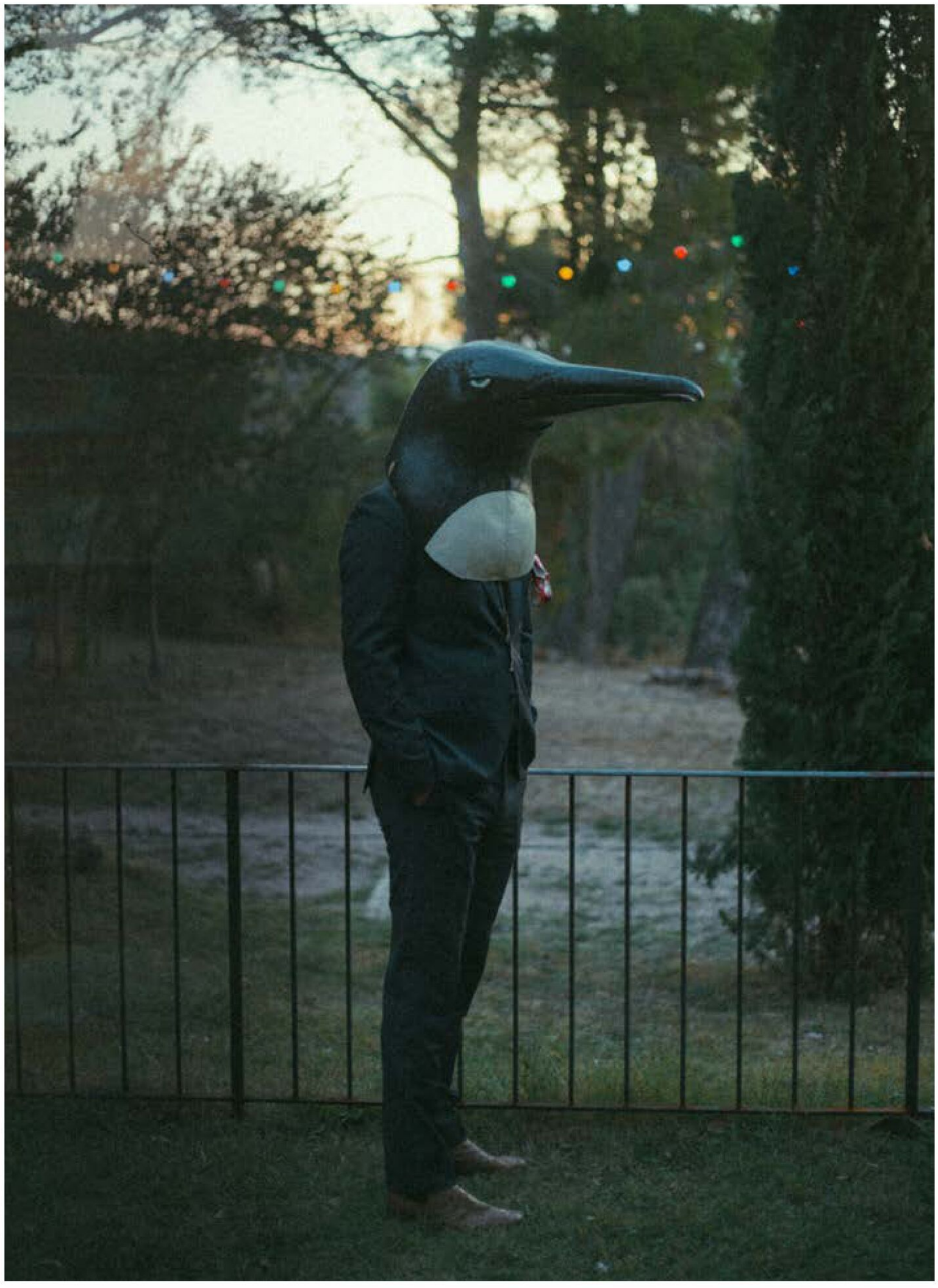
Penguin Cafe Orchestra's debut album, 'Music From The Penguin Cafe', was released in 1976 on Brian Eno's groundbreaking esoterica label, Obscure.

"Like any good explorer, Simon was both alert and humble," Eno once said of Jeffes. "He had no trace of musical snobbery but delighted in the length and breadth of music, happy to experiment with all combinations."

PCO gave their first major live performance in October 1976, supporting Kraftwerk at the Roundhouse in north London. It might seem an unlikely pairing, yet their shared musical terrain wasn't too far apart. Although rooted in folk, classical and jazz, the Orchestra also borrowed the textures and rhythms of the analogue electronica scene as it blossomed in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Arthur has fond childhood memories of his father tinkering with Korgs and Ataris, early samplers and an embryonic version of MIDI sequencer software Logic to make "rather beautiful, iterative, loop-based pieces".

When Arthur began composing his own work in the 1990s, he used the same equipment to make his first stab at electronic dance music. This omnivorous, endlessly curious approach is a direct line between father and son.

"Someone once described my dad's music as electronic music played on real instruments," he says. "It's not a bad way of describing Penguin Cafe as well. Sometimes, when people ask us what we do, I say 'electronica-classical crossover, with a bit of folk'. Ha! The more words you put into that sentence, the less it means. But the electronic thing is definitely there. There's a lot of dad's Prophet-5 on the early albums, and I've still got it in my studio. We've used laptops in the past, as well as MIDI keyboards I was sticking chopsticks into to get held notes."



Before founding Penguin Cafe, Arthur dabbled in dance music and hip hop production. With a degree in archaeology and anthropology from Cambridge, he also worked on various digs and research projects around the globe. In 2006, he joined the British team for 'Blizzard: Race To The Pole', a BBC Two show recreating the 1911 scramble to reach the South Pole that had ended in icy death for Robert Falcon Scott and his men. All this Antarctic monkeying had a personal connection for Arthur – his great-grandmother Kathleen Scott was married to the doomed polar explorer. Penguins run deep in this family.

"When Scott died and obviously didn't come back, she then married my great-grandfather," he reveals. "It was a very bizarre opportunity just to dress up in Edwardian gear and go and hang around the ice caps for a few months."

A year after his South Pole adventure, Arthur played a trio of shows at London's Union Chapel with the surviving members of the original Penguin Cafe Orchestra to mark the 10th anniversary of his father's death. But it felt like an ending, not a new beginning. The idea of taking over the family business was never on the table.

"It was just a profoundly lovely thing to be involved with," recalls Arthur. "But I was quite a lot younger than my dad's musicians and extremely junior to them in terms of both competence and musicianship."

Only later did Arthur feel confident enough to reclaim and build on his father's musical legacy, forming Penguin Cafe with none of the original PCO members. Instead, he drew from a wide talent pool, with Neil Codling of Suede, Cass Browne of Gorillaz and Northumbrian pipes queen Kathryn Tickell joining the initial line-up and album sessions.

Soon afterwards, five players from the original Penguin Cafe Orchestra regrouped to play their back catalogue, first under the name The Anteaters, then as The Orchestra That Fell To Earth. These veterans are still sporadically active, but Arthur insists they all remain on cordial terms and have not become rival Penguin factions.

"It's not like UB40," he laughs.

Since forming, Penguin Cafe have recorded four studio albums, with a fifth currently in gestation. They write and play original music, with Arthur as principal composer and self-confessed "benign dictator". But they are also keeping the Penguin Cafe Orchestra canon alive, with plenty of throwbacks and echoes in the mix. They've even retained a distant connection to Kraftwerk, recording a sparse chamber-folk version of 'Franz Schubert' on their 2017 album 'The Imperfect Sea', which earned an endorsement from the secretive Kling Klang chieftains themselves.

"That was like playing electronic music on bass, cello and harmonium," says Arthur. "Rebecca, our cellist, thought it would be cool to record herself digging her hand into a bowl of salt, which sounded like someone walking through snow… so we got in touch with Kraftwerk through their management and they sent back a corporate thumbs-up. Ha! But we're not actually in direct contact."

The Brian Eno/Penguins connection has also endured for half a century. The egghead pop professor remains a family friend, and Arthur is even an irregular guest at Eno's informal weekly choir sessions in west London.

"He's still great friends with my mum," says Arthur. "Every now and then I've suggested a couple of things, but I think he's the busiest person I've ever come across. The amount of stuff he gets involved in is incredible. His group is a movable feast of whoever happens to be in town. It's purely for the joy of singing, and it's fun to sing with a bunch of people. How often do you get the chance to do that in modern life?"

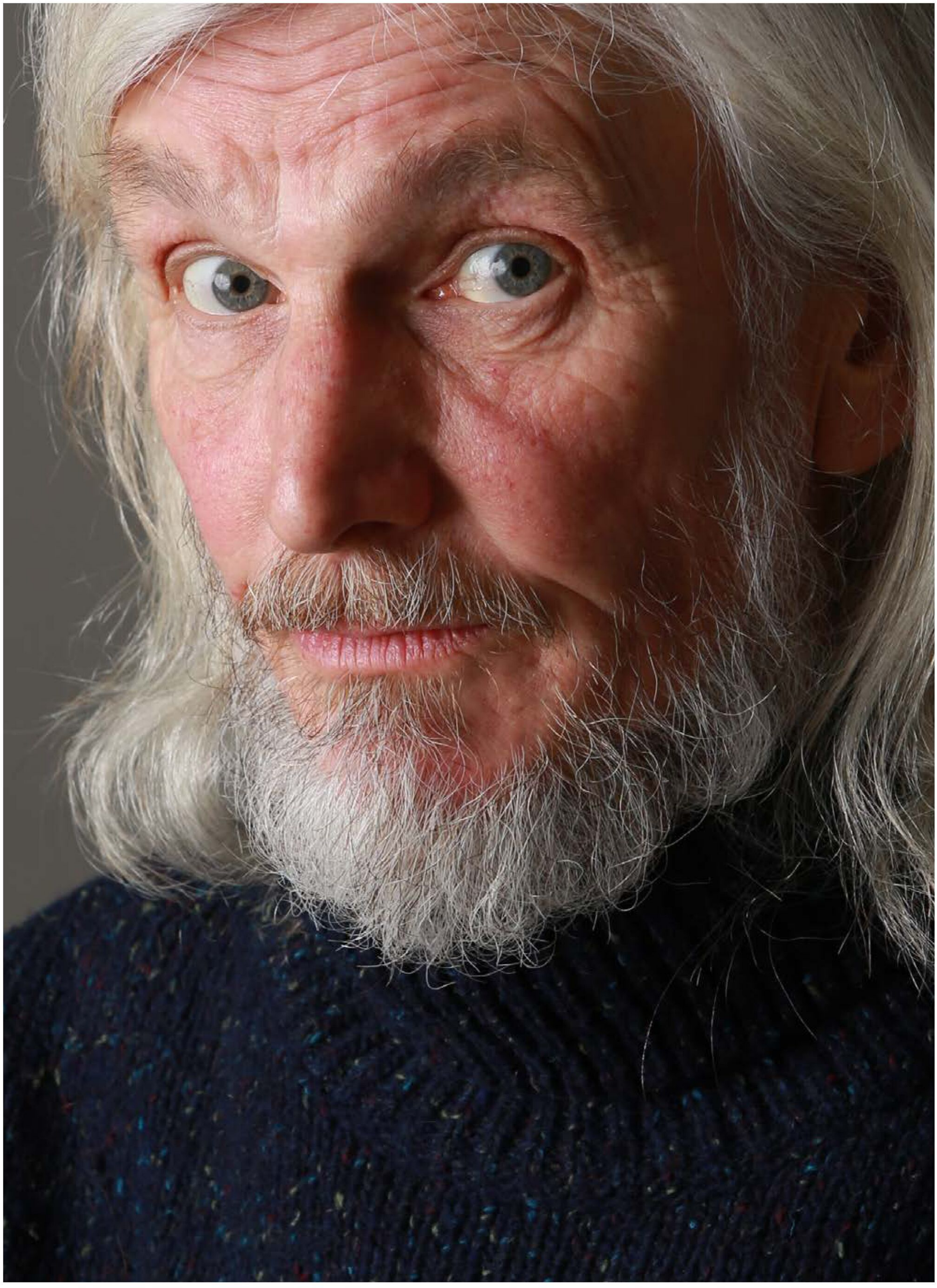
The past hangs heavy over Penguin Cafe for obvious reasons, but Arthur insists that they're looking backwards to move forwards. While the band clearly began as a love letter to Penguin Cafe Orchestra, their founder and main composer tries to avoid self-referential pastiche. His father left him with "intellectual tools", he says, not firm rules. "It's about the approach rather than the elements."

Keeping that exploratory ethos alive means finding a careful balance between imitation and innovation, tradition and reinvention.

"It is a slightly strange line to be treading," agrees Arthur. "When I started doing this, I realised that there is a fine balance to be found in the middle. If you get to the end of the composing process and you realise, 'Oh yeah, this is somewhere my dad has already been', it's a nice feeling.

"But I definitely try to avoid things in a straightforward sense that are too musically similar. We don't want to end up aping particular pieces – that really wouldn't feel right. It wouldn't have that light touch that we seek out."

The reissue of 'A Matter Of Life…' is out now on Erased Tapes



HOW VERY DARE YOU

DAVID M ALLEN

Mixing desk wizard David M Allen discusses his role in the making of what may well be one of the greatest synthpop albums of all time... and The Human League's 'Dare'

WORDS & PICTURES: MARK ROLAND

You may recognise David M Allen's name. He's best known as a producer and studio engineer. Look at the credits on The Human League's 'Dare', a run of albums by The Cure, key releases by The Chameleons, Wire and many others, and there you will find him, helming the mixing desk and helping to birth some of the era's most beloved records. Now, more than 40 years after it was recorded, he has an album of his own – 'The DNA Of DMA'. It's an archival find that would be at home in the Minimal Wave catalogue and is of particular interest because of its backstory and connection to the making of 'Dare'.

The expurgated version of the story behind 'The DNA Of DMA' is fairly straightforward. Allen was working with Martin Rushent in the late 1970s and early 80s. With fresh hits by The Stranglers and Buzzcocks under his belt, the esteemed producer went to America towards the end of 1980 for a few weeks, leaving Allen to take delivery of a Roland System 700, with a Roland MC-8 MicroComposer. The instruction from Rushent was simple enough – "Learn how to use all this new gear...".

So Allen spent a couple of weeks "in a fugue state", living at Rushent's Genetic Studios (which were then in mid-construction), attempting to master the considerable intricacies of the Japanese computer and its oscillator-stacked pal. The result was nine tracks of lively proto-synthpop and experimental electronica. When Rushent heard them, he said, "It's a good job you're in – we've got The Human League coming next week!". And lo, the technological blueprint for the most important British synthpop album of all time was created. Amen.

The longer version is, as you'd expect, more convoluted, which is why we find ourselves scoffing a bacon sarnie in a cafe around the corner from Allen's north London studio. With his flowing white hair and beard, he doesn't look much like an architect of synthpop, but then who does?

"Well, once you reach a certain age, it's either Gandalf or Phil Mitchell, isn't it?" he quips.

When I tell him my understanding of the process behind the creation of 'The DNA Of DMA', his response is something of an understatement.

"Well, it's a little bit more complicated than that..."

In late 1978, Allen was the bass player in a band called Pinpoint. He shared writing and singing duties with guitarist Arturo Bassick (aka Arthur Billingsley), who had departed from his previous outfit, The Lurkers. Pinpoint had considerably more to recommend them to the public than The Lurkers' lo-fi pub rock/punk stylings and were being nurtured – if that's the right word – by management company Albion. They occupied a space somewhere between the post-punk, art school cleverness of Wire and the head-rush pop of Buzzcocks. Albion, who also managed The Stranglers, put Pinpoint's records out on their own label.

The band's first single was released in 1979, a highly collectable seven-inch called 'Richmond' produced by Vic Maile (who subsequently did Motörhead's 'Ace Of Spades'). They then went into the studio with Vic Coppersmith-Heaven (The Jam, The Vapors) to no avail, before finally having a stab at the album with Martin Rushent. But in the rapidly changing pop landscape of the late 1970s, time was running out for Pinpoint.

"Instead of bashing out all the stuff we had and making a first album, then moving on to a second, time moved on," says Allen. "All the songs we'd written were a year off-base, then it became 18 months off-base."

Both Rushent and Albion thought that electronic music was the future, and nudged Pinpoint accordingly.

"That pretty much cut Arthur out of the picture," says Allen.

It also drove a wedge between them, with Allen's songs accounting for 80 per cent of Pinpoint's material. The band split up, which Bassick maintains was the intention all along, leaving Allen a solo performer of no fixed abode. With Rushent taking him under his wing, Allen was expected to knock out an electronic new wave long-player at Genetic.

"Martin wanted to sign me as a solo artist because he wanted to do his own label, Genetic Records," he explains. "He went away to do an album in America, I'd left Pinpoint and was in the process of disengaging myself from Albion – which took two years – and he offered me 10 days' studio time. He said, 'Come up and do some demos. My techie bloke will be able to get you going'."

The day he arrived, however, the unnamed techie bloke left, leaving Allen to cope on his own with the complications of a studio that was still being built.

"So there I was, just trying to learn how to put a two-inch tape on, let alone record the codes. I was the first person to use any of this stuff. There was loads of it that I had no fucking idea how to work."

Allen was unboxing the future and his own destiny in the shape of Roland's System 700 and the MC-8. And he was desperate.

"I was sitting there thinking it was the end of my career. I had 10 days, and the guy who was supposed to be helping me had gone."

The MC-8 was a complicated piece of kit, acknowledged as the most sophisticated stand-alone sequencer on the market at the time. It certainly wasn't intended to be used by oiks from post-punk bands.

"It was designed to do classical, not pop music," says Allen. "The example given in the manual was the 'Brandenburg Concertos' transcribed into MC-8 notation. This was one of the first attempts to do pop music on that structure, with that sort of equipment."

Nonetheless, he was able to wrangle the gear and record a clutch of songs.

"This is late 1980 and January 1981," he remembers. "I had a whole album ready to go. When Martin heard these demos, he didn't say very much, but I think he must have thought, 'Fuck me, how's he managed to do this?'."

Perhaps it wasn't the end of his career after all.

The tracks he recorded now sound like a bridge between the decades. There's plenty of art-school weirdness on 'The DNA Of DMA', most notably on opener 'You And I', while the wild 'The Passion Of Father Bernard' ventures into early Radiophonic Workshop territory. 'The Dice Are Loaded' could be a Human League demo. But it's clearly heading into the bright pop world with 'The Sound Of Muzak' and 'Just A Combination', while the fast synthpop instrumental of 'Is It Nowhere' sounds like a Devo outtake, complete with staccato, sugar-rush melodies, tightly synced arpeggios and explosions.

Given the circumstances, Allen's mastery of the gear, not to mention his attention to rhythmic detail and melody, is very impressive. It's no real surprise that he came to play a pivotal role on 'Dare'.

"I mean, it's got loads of problems," he notes. "All these mistakes you make when you start – it's over-compressed and the mix isn't great. It's quite funny listening to it now because the producer/engineer in me goes, 'For fuck's sake, what's going on here?'. But it's such a long time ago that I can forgive myself."

Yet almost as soon as Allen had completed his intense solo recording sessions, his cruise towards a new pop identity with the hottest producer in town at the controls was scuppered as news filtered in from the post-punk frontline that Buzzcocks had split. Rushent immediately poached Pete Shelley.

"And that blew me out of the water," says Allen.

Within days of the last Buzzcocks show in Germany in January 1981, Shelley was hunkered down in Genetic Studios with Rushent, recording the album that would become 'Homosapien'. Unsurprisingly, the project took precedence over the work by the ex-bass player of Pinpoint.

"I thought 'Homosapien' was genius," says Allen. "It's a fucking brilliant record. Acoustics and electronics – what a great combination, with Pete on the 12-string. I was the other artist on Martin's nascent label."

This was Rushent's second attempt at starting a label. This time around, the prospect of getting major-label backing looked more hopeful.

"He had Pete Shelley," explains Allen. "So it was easier for him to talk to Chris Blackwell at Island with an established artist, a proven songwriter, and posit him in this new electronic world."

Rushent's first attempt to engineer Genetic into life had been crushed by big label machinations.

"Martin had an office above the Blitz in London," recalls Allen. "That's how he got into all the new romantic stuff. He'd done demos with Spandau Ballet and Joy Division, and he was thick with a guy called Andrew Lauder [former A&R at Liberty/United Artists, who had signed Buzzcocks and The Stranglers], who formed a record company called Radar.

"He went in for a meeting and played them his Joy Division demos and Spandau Ballet's 'To Cut A Long Story Short'. And they said, 'They're fucking rubbish. We're dropping you'. So you can imagine how bitter Martin was. I think that's one of the reasons he so gleefully took all the props for The Human League. It was payback for being told to fuck off three years before."

In 1981, The Human League were an unusual band at a critical point in their history. The wound from the split with Martyn Ware and Ian Craig Marsh was still fresh, although they continued to frostily share a studio in Sheffield with their erstwhile bandmates.

Ware and Marsh's Heaven 17 were perceived as the safe bet to deliver on the promise of the League's hit-making potential, while Phil Oakey was lumbered with the band's debt and a contracted tour at the end of 1980 with his wholly unprepared new recruits, sixth-formers Joanne Catherall and Susan Ann Sulley.

The tour kicked off in Doncaster in November 1980, just days after the new line-up had been thrown together. On a bootleg of the concert, Oakey can be heard introducing the band with nervous laughter.

"This is the first concert of a wonderful new tour by a Human League that was born five days ago…"

Despite shambolic appearances, the League were destined for greater things, fulfilling Oakey's vision of becoming a futurist "electronic Abba" for the 1980s. The aesthetics having been addressed, now he just needed the music to hit the spot, and the team to make the album would be Martin Rushent and David M Allen. The Human League had been demoing the tracks in Sheffield, so by the time they arrived at Genetic, they were ready to go.

"They had songs and demos," says Allen. "Jo [Callis] had left the Rezillos, so he had songs ready, or chords for songs. When we did 'Don't You Want Me', everyone else had gone back to Sheffield, but Jo didn't have anywhere to live, so he stayed and we did all of the backing track with Martin. I don't think there was anything on it that wasn't in the original backing track.

"When Phil and Adrian Wright came back, Phil's going [Yorkshire accent] 'Oh, I don't know about that…'. They didn't like it. Mind you, Martin's chorus was, 'I'm a cunt / You're a cunt / We're all cunts, woohoo!'. Phil spent two days trying to come up with some proper words, and when he came in and went [Yorkshire accent again], 'Don't you want me, baby / Don't you want me, oh-oh!', me and Martin were like, 'Really?'.

"Jo had a guitar background and could hardly play keys. Adrian didn't play keys, although he was great at slides. Ian Burden was an excellent bass player but all his basslines were transposed onto the System 700. Phil was very good, with his one-fingered keys. It's him doing the cats at the front of 'Love Action' and the bottles on a Korg. He's very underrated for that. He was able to cover the songs with that tenor voice. The chorus vocal on 'Don't You Want Me' was done with the tape running a semitone flat to get that high note."

When the The Human League toured the album at the end of 1981, Smash Hits' Dave Rimmer neatly summed up their new status in his review of their Bradford show: "After such a short time as a chart-topping band, their live set seems full of hit singles."

David M Allen became a sought-after and high-profile producer himself in the wake of 'Dare', going on to work with Depeche Mode, The Sisters Of Mercy and Neneh Cherry, among many others. As we flick through his miraculously intact invoice book from 1981 – including entries for those pioneering Human League sessions – I ask how he feels now about the work he did back in 1981.

"It's difficult to place yourself in history when history is happening," he muses. "I did bust my arse. We did think it was the future, but we were a little bit early. I was absolutely besotted with the studio. Now I'm older, the days are precious and I like to be out and see a bit of the sun. I still do stuff and I still like singing. It's good for your head, otherwise there wouldn't be all these fucking choirs everywhere. And possibly people might be more interested in this than a new Human League album."

'The DNA Of DMA' is out now on Themsay

THE HISTORY MEN

Since 1981, In The Nursery's cinematic soundscapes have evolved in fascinating ways, yet remained timeless. Their latest album is a deeply personal and beautifully orchestrated journey into their family history – and is perhaps the duo's finest work to date

WORDS: JEREMY ALLEN

If the past is indeed a foreign country, then In The Nursery like to visit regularly. For the last four decades, they've made their own distinctive chiaroscuro darkwave with romantic overtones, offset since 1996 by their Optical Music Series, where they soundtrack some of the great movies of the silent era – 'The Cabinet Of Dr Caligari', 'The Passion Of Joan Of Arc', 'Man With A Movie Camera' and more.

While it might sound counterintuitive, In The Nursery's Klive and Nigel Humberstone tend not to look back when it comes to their creativity, even if their inspiration is sometimes a century old. Their rousing symphonia is an innovative melange of sonic artefacts – library samples, timpani and live strings, often recorded with an old ribbon microphone, creating something uniquely ITN. They've been variously described as "martial industrial", neoclassical or even, as Nigel says with a shudder, "gods of the bombastic". But, all the while, In The Nursery have continued to do their thing, undeterred by the whims of fashion.

That being said, the Humberstone twins recently found themselves taking stock throughout the parenthesis of the pandemic. Circumstances forced them to look back and reassess who they were, especially following the death of their older brother Richard in 2019.

"Although those things take a while to catch up with you, you start reflecting on the fact that you are the remainders," says Nigel. "We are the remnants of our family."

Their 2017 album '1961' – reissued last year – returns to the scene of their birth, paying tribute to Yuri Gagarin, 'Solaris' and the Ford Consul, among other 1961 relics. Klive and Nigel take delight in noticing things that others don't. Like, for instance, 1961 being a strobogrammatic year – an irregular palindrome that is rotationally symmetrical. They say '1961' was a very personal album, but their 2022 follow-up, 'Humberstone', delves even further into the people they are and where they come from.

'Humberstone' pays tribute to their antecedents. Stretching back across several centuries, it takes in war veterans, cavalrymen, gunsmiths, seamstresses, jewellers, a ploughman and their father, Arthur Humberstone, who died in 1999.

"Our dad was an animator," says Klive via video call from Sheffield. "So we've got lots of ephemera stored in the studio. We're slowly going through the archive."

Nigel, his identical twin, is in another window, but in a separate Sheffield location. Klive's moustache and Nigel's glasses help me tell them apart, though they're so similar that the recording software I'm using can't differentiate between their voices.

They grew up in Cookham, a leafy Berkshire village on the outskirts of Maidenhead, where Arthur had his studio. Humberstone Senior worked on everything from The Beatles' 'Yellow Submarine' to 'Watership Down' and the TV movie of 'The Lion, The Witch & The Wardrobe'. These are very psychedelic animations, I say, whereas Cookham is perhaps the least psychedelic place on Earth.

"Yeah, he used to go up to London to work quite a lot in Portobello and Kensington," says Klive. "He was one of the elders, I guess. During the swinging 60s, he would have probably been in his swinging 60s."

Apparently, for the making of 'Yellow Submarine', just about anyone who drew professionally in the UK would have received the call, but for a work like 'Watership Down', their father would have been allowed to impose his own style on the project.

"We kept loads of rabbits and we had dogs at home," says Nigel. "And at the very beginning, when they had the character sheets for the different rabbits, he took that on board and researched it. Those sheets then became the characters in the film, so it was fascinating to see."

The pair lost their mother in 2012 and were hit hard by the death of their brother seven years later. Richard worked in publishing and design, and it was he who researched the Humberstone family tree, helping to uncover a cast of lost descendants and their stories.

Richard – or rather the child version of Richard – appears in ITN's video for 'Ektachrome (The Animator)', the first track to be released from the new album. He is several years older than his twin brothers, who are both dressed as cowboys. The older Humberstone boy can be seen in the Super 8 montage being chased playfully across the garden as the sunlight drenches the camera lens, a happy and slightly uncanny moment captured from the mid-1960s. The images have been digitised from a large surplus of film canisters, a pile of aluminium you imagine they're not quite finished with yet.

"Aside from being an animator, our dad was also an avid filmmaker," says Klive. "When we were on holidays or out anywhere, he'd be there with his Super 8 camera."

The idyllic video also features footage of their mother, sitting serenely on a coastal clifftop, with crisp, slinky bass accompanied by John Barry-like strings drenched in reverb. It conjures a mood that elicits memories in the viewer, even if they're not our own.

"A lot of people were very pleased to see a Chopper," says Nigel, laughing.

He's referring to the iconic Raleigh bicycle from the 1970s that one of the twins – in his early teens – can be seen pedalling in the film. In the mid-70s, their dad would draw the curtains and show these films at family gatherings.

"He'd set up a film projector and play these movies he'd taken by the seaside, down by the river or us in the garden playing," remembers Klive. "And he'd always set it to music he liked."

Arthur's personal preferences included 'A Swingin' Safari' by Bert Kaempfert And His Orchestra and anything by Tammy Wynette. In the hands of the Humberstone twins, it becomes documentary material soundtracked by an imaginary library classic from the KPM All-Stars. If it appears to have a nostalgic sheen, then In The Nursery are not that interested. They're more like historians – in this case, chronicling their own lineage and bringing it alive for a contemporary audience.

In The Nursery often convene with analogue ghosts, too. In 2006, they were asked to bring to sonic life the BFI DVD 'The Electric Edwardians'. The piece chronicles a series of "local films for local people" shot by the Mitchell & Kenyon film company in the early part of the 20th century, showing working-class schoolkids mugging at the camera or workers leaving a factory in Sheffield. Those same players were then charged to watch themselves at a cinema extravaganza a few nights later.

At the time, the films were used to make a quick buck, but they're now invaluable social records from a barely documented period, when nascent film equipment was rare and difficult to transport – if you could lay your hands on any in the first place. There's something haunting about seeing children playing, full of vitality, yet knowing they probably died several generations ago.

"You look at these kids and think, 'In 10 years' time, the Great War will start and they may not get through it'," says Nigel. "You see people walking with bowed legs, probably from rickets. You see how they dressed, how many wore hats. It's amazing to look at, and it's got great footage of Sheffield."

"You see how people react to the camera, which is just stuck to the ground," adds Klive. "A lot of them are standing still because they think it's a normal camera and they're having their photograph taken."

That sense of the eerie is certainly present in the new work. The packaging for 'Humberstone' is as tactile and evocative as you might have hoped – a CD that feels more like a family heirloom, marked with an ITN insignia on the cover and featuring an old typewriter on the back. Each track is listed in the order the ideas came to the pair. So, for instance, 'Ektachrome (The Animator)' is listed as H43 and 'Redpits (The Gardener)' is H31.

"I started getting these ideas together and the best way to catalogue them was to say this is H7 or H8," says Nigel. "You can see that many of the early ones weren't developed."

These numbers also correspond with photos from the archive, reproduced in the booklet accompanying the CD. For H43 – relating to the epic 'Émigré (The Dressmaker)' – there's a sepia-toned shot of Arthur Humberstone as a young man holding his camera, while 'H24 Mallards (The Storyteller)' is duly linked to a silhouetted profile of their mother. The closing track, 'H57b A Room At The End Of The Mind (The Jeweller)', correlates with the picture of a dapper, handsome chap in a dinner jacket. The family resemblance is remarkable.

"It's fascinating because there were gunmakers, and one was a jeweller," says Nigel. "You discover the things they did and you get closer to your grandparents. What they did when you were growing up as a very small kid – you didn't realise it at the time, but you sort of understand it now. It is quite comforting, and I think musically we've tried to capture that, although we didn't think too hard about it. And we're probably trying to think too hard about it now."

With 'Humberstone', they've managed to reanimate forebears who were caught up in tragedies, extending an empathetic hand across time. The opening track, 'H21 Émigré (The Dressmaker)', is attached to a remarkable piece of family history.

"Our brother had highlighted that one of our past ancestors was on a immigrant ship going over to New Zealand," continues Nigel. "And when we looked back into that it was an amazing story, where these wooden ships were sailing around South Africa, and then there was a fire on board. The whole ship goes down and you've got no supplies or lifeboats. Something like that was what you wanted to write music about."

‘H47 Suvla Bay (The Cavalryman)’ concerns their great-uncle, Tom Squire, who was in the infamous Gallipoli campaign in the First World War. He had joined a yeomanry regiment known as the Rough Riders, though his training would be for nothing.

“He was part of the landing at Suvla Bay,” says Klive. “We’ve got copies of the letters he typed back to his mother and father, recounting what he did during those beach attacks in 1915. And it really does make your mouth fall open.”

“They got on boats, went to Cairo, went to Gallipoli,” expands Nigel. “And they did the beach landings and realised, ‘Oh, you don’t need horses for beach landings’. So they got stuck on foot and had to suffer untold horrors in these trenches, just waiting to be shot at by the Turks.”

The track was built on the sound of a Korg MS-20 detuning itself to the point where it breaks up and there’s no longer any sound coming from the machine. It was patched into MIDI with notation sent to a cellist, who accompanied the descending line, evoking the harrowing tones of modern warfare.

“I’m anti-war, big time,” adds Klive. “And you sort of realise that they did what they had to, sending typewritten letters back to their mum and dad, saying people you knew weren’t around anymore or wouldn’t be coming back. It’s very succinct.”

Sgt Thomas Arthur Squire survived Suvla Bay, but he wouldn’t make it out of the war alive. On 30 November 1917, he died from injuries sustained during the Battle of Jerusalem.

“Defending the Empire,” says Klive, with ironic disdain.

Does so much personal archival footage fortify memory, or do memories remain precisely because the footage exists? In the modern age, where everything is instantly documented with camera phones and social media, what will be the impact on the recall of modern generations? This is a question the Humberstone brothers ponder.

“It’s quite odd, isn't it?” says Klive. “I’ve looked back on memories and wondered if they are actual events I’ve experienced or if I’m remembering a movie or footage of it.”

“That’s a really interesting point,” muses Nigel. “But having those measurable reminders is great. One of the tracks has a very small excerpt of an audio recording of our mum reading a bedtime story to us. Nowadays, you can just pop your phone on record and capture the moment. But a lot of people don’t have those things, so I feel quite privileged to have had that from our background. It certainly helped with the making of that track, which we built around the audio.”

Is it comforting to have all these mementoes?

“I guess it is, yeah,” says Klive. A Pinter-esque pause ensues. “It makes greater sense of the family and the past, and gives you more of a grasp of where you came from, of your ancestors and what they did. It brings things together.”

‘Humberstone’ is out now on ITN Corporation

SOUND JUDGEMENT

Presented by The Museum Of Sound, the New BBC Radiophonic Workshop and others, the winners of the 2021 Sound Of The Year Awards have recently been announced. Lead judge Matthew Herbert explains why sound can be so evocative – and provocative

WORDS: MAT SMITH

Matthew Herbert, Chair of the Sound Of The Year Award judging panel – and, of course, a highly acclaimed electronicist, producer and sonic adventurer in his own right – is reflecting on the process of recording sound.

"There's something really political about it," he says. "To record good-quality sound, you have to shut up. I think there's something really poetic and useful about that at a time when we have Facebook and Twitter, and we're constantly being asked to say what we think. When you're capturing sound, you have to start from the opposite perspective. You have to listen."

The Sound Of The Year Awards (SOTYA) arose out of Herbert's creative directorship of the New BBC Radiophonic Workshop. They exist alongside the Oram Awards (named after pioneering composer Daphne Oram, from the original BBC Radiophonic Workshop), which celebrate the next generation of forward-thinking women and gender-minority artists for their innovative work in music and related technologies.

Herbert describes both of these initiatives as ways of forming new communities, and as a catalyst for forging greater connections between different artists and scenes that had typically existed in the margins. After five successful years, the Orams have established a powerful network of female and gender-minority musicians. Even though the SOTYAs are only in their second year, they have already resulted in an incredible archive of intriguing and often thought-provoking sounds.

"What's really interesting is just how socially and politically conscious the entries have been from the very beginning," reveals Herbert. "Last year, the majority of the submissions were Covid-related, or about Black Lives Matter, or some of the other social protest movements that were emerging at the same time. The Sound Of The Year turned out to be a hard category to judge.

"We also had a lot of debate this year around Most Unpleasant Sound and what that means. Is it technically a really unpleasant sound? Or is it *politically* an unpleasant sound? What does it tell you? It raises so many other questions. The Awards were never intended to be a technical exercise. Initially, you think it might be for sound nerds, but it immediately had bigger resonances outside of the sound community, which I think is exciting."

Categories also include Best Designed Individual Sound, Disappearing Sound (one that may well soon be lost for good), and Best Sound Innovation In Everyday Life. The Awards are judged by Herbert and an eclectic mix of individuals picked from the recording, acoustic engineering and film re-recording industries, but also from unexpected places, in keeping with its more expansive socio-political leanings – Poppy Szkiler from Quiet Mark, an organisation focused on finding solutions to minimising unwanted noise from buildings and appliances, audio artist and poet Axel Kacoutié, and British Library Sound Archive curator Andrea Zarza Canova, among others.

If the inaugural SOTYA inevitably focused on the sounds of racial protest and the pandemic, the entries this year were heavily influenced by the harrowing prognosis and already visible impact of climate change.

MATTHEW HERBERT - PHOTO: TURKINA FASO

"Concern for the environment really shone through this year," says Herbert. "One entry was recorded at the front of the Adamello Glacier, the largest glacial mass in the Italian Alps, which will soon be gone. Sergio Maggioni did some quite incredible recordings by putting microphones down holes drilled into the front of the ice. That's a really amazing noise. Alex Keller recorded insects that only come out every 16 years or so. You have a mating chorus and then you hear aeroplanes pass in the background.

"The winner of Sound Of The Year is brilliantly recorded. It's a piece by Jacob Job, of bald eagles crying in distress while the forest burns beneath them. You can hear the wildfire helicopters off in the distance, but because of the mountains, you also get this echoing of these bald eagles crying. It reminds me of a very iconic noise that's in the British Sound Archive. It's a Second World War recording of a nightingale singing with a Lancaster bomber in the background.

"There's a sense of separation in our everyday lives from the immediate and very strongest impacts of climate change. If your house is burning or if you're flooded, then it's there, in your face. But I think for many of us, there's a certain detachment from it, of trying to understand what [American author] James Howard Kunstler calls the 'long emergency'. What Jacob captured is very beautiful in that context."

Another theme that ran prominently through this year's Awards was the resonance of a mental health crisis.

"It was a big issue for a lot of people, particularly in the Imagined Sound category," says Herbert. "Lots of people were listening for the sounds of solitude, of depression, or of not being able to cope, because of the climate crisis, the inequality in society and everything else that's been going on. The Awards are great for this. They ask questions you weren't expecting."

The winner of the Best Sound Innovation In Everyday Life category is Justin Wiggan's 'Echo Point'. His concept is to install buttons in locations like bus shelters for people to press if they're feeling overwhelmed, triggering soothing noises to reduce anxiety and give advice on breathing.

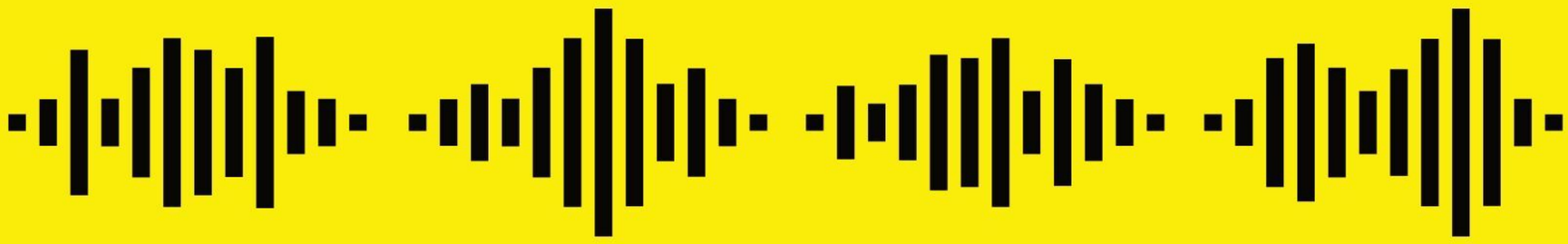
"Sound is a measurement of time, and recording it is one of the most evocative, or provocative, measurements we can use," concludes Herbert. "Immediately, you've caught something that's not there anymore. Your microphone has a huge power, in terms of what you point it towards, and *when* you point.

"One of the traps that we fall into when we're recording or editing sound is that very often we're looking for the transient point, or the moment of drama. I recorded the sound of a tree for a week, and then I chopped it down. Everyone skips to the bit where the tree gets cut down. That's not necessarily the entire story about how something may have occurred, or our best way of measuring an experience.

"I'm pleased that we had such a variety of different – and powerful – approaches to recording sound this year. It's the ability to tell stories and to connect in a new kind of way that makes the Awards so exciting for me."

Sound Of The Year Awards: The Winners

From bald eagles to deconstructed music boxes, the Sound Of The Year Awards showcase sonic environments in all their forms. Here, we profile the winning entries



Award	SOUND OF THE YEAR	BEST NATURALLY OCCURRING SOUND	DISAPPEARING SOUND	BEST DESIGNED INDIVIDUAL SOUND
Brief	A SOUND THAT CAPTURES 2021	A SOUND THAT OCCURS WITHOUT HUMAN INPUT	A SOUND UNLIKELY TO BE HEARD IN FUTURE, BUT THAT IS WORTH SAVING	AN INDIVIDUAL SOUND CREATED FOR A TV SHOW, FILM, GAME OR OTHER MEDIA
Winner	**Jacob Job** USA	**Fabian Holzinger** AUSTRIA	**Álvaro G Díaz-Rodríguez** MEXICO	**Drew Zercoe** USA
	‘Bald Eagles And Wildfire Helicopters’	**‘The Kits Are Alright (At The Beaver Lodge)’**	**‘Night Of Xantolo’**	**‘Broken Trunk’**
	“I spent 2021 recording sounds in Rocky Mountain National Park to understand the impact of brutal climate change-driven fire on wildlife,” says Job. “This recording was made within the East Troublesome Fire burn scar and captures the sound of firefighting helicopters as they perform clean-up operations, while an adult bald eagle calls out from a burned forest along the Colorado River. The contrast is heartbreaking – this is our national bird caught in the consequences of our collective climate inaction.”	“I started with hip hop and turntablism as a teenager,” says Holzinger, “and moved into more electronic and experimental fields while developing a keen obsession with field recording. Over the last two years, I’ve spent a lot of time researching a beaver family living at the shore of the Danube, recording them inside their lodge. Here, the kits are approximately two weeks old and will stay inside for another two weeks before they start to leave the cosy lodge occasionally.”	“I began the field recording when I asked myself, ‘What did my childhood sound like?’,” says Díaz-Rodríguez. “In Barrio de Cuayo, Mexico, there is a town of less than 100 people, where the Day Of The Dead is celebrated in a unique way, with candles, ancient dances, songs and the sound of crickets – everything happens simultaneously. Being a very small town, it will likely disappear soon… I think it makes it special by transporting you to another sound dimension.”	“My entry is a piece from my most recent album, ‘Ashes’,” says Zercoe. “I created it by sonifying images of the aftermath of the CZU Lightning Complex fires which tore through Northern California in 2020. The singular sound is the sum of several tone generators set to microtonal scales and CV-controlled effects.”

MOST UNPLEASANT SOUND

A SOUND THAT HAS CAUSED SIGNIFICANT DISTRESS

Alëna Korolëva
CANADA

'Air Show'

"I'm a sound artist and curator," says Korolëva. "Labour Day weekend in Toronto is traditionally celebrated with an air show. Piercing sounds of military jets silence everything in the city in an attempt to show power and dominance with sounds of war and terror, which for some reason is celebrated with pride. A small cricket hiding from the crowds of onlookers keeps sending his signals, falling out of rhythm and finding it again, despite the deafening human thunder which cuts through the air."

BEST INNOVATION IN A SOUND TOOL OR TECHNIQUE

A TOOL OR PIECE OF TECH THAT HAS MADE WORKING WITH SOUND RESULT IN A GREATER EXPERIENCE

Strange Pill
SPAIN

'Musicjelly Mashup' (iOS app)

"We're musicians, performers, producers and audio-visual artists experimenting with music as collage," say Strange Pill. "The Musicjelly Mashup iOS app has been our long-term R&D project, an evolution of our video loop-based mashable interactive installation, Audio Visual Music Machine. It's a sampler/launchpad taking field recordings and electronic music to a visual realm and using short video as the new breakbeat."

BEST SOUND INNOVATION IN EVERYDAY LIFE

A NEW TECHNOLOGY, APPLIANCE OR TECHNIQUE THAT HAS IMPROVED HOW THE SOUND OF SOMETHING IS EXPERIENCED IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Justin Wiggan
UK

'Echo Point'

"'Echo Point' is a bespoke sound file that plays a carefully curated and structured soundscape," says Wiggan. "It helps users redirect negative emotions and enter a state of calm to improve emotional mental health and create a resilient community. The aim is to create renewable mental health through sound via an interventional breathing and listening activity which will redirect negative thoughts."

COMPOSED WITH SOUND

A COMPOSITION MADE PREDOMINANTLY USING RECORDED SOUND RATHER THAN MUSICAL OR ELECTRONIC INSTRUMENTS

Leah Reid
USA

'Reverie'

"I'm a composer of acoustic, electronic and electroacoustic music," says Reid. "'Reverie' is an acousmatic composition that leads the listener through an immersive fantasy centred around deconstructed music boxes. The boxes' sounds are pulled apart, exaggerated and combined with other sounds whose timbres and textures are reminiscent of the original. As the piece unfolds, the associations become more and more fantastical. Gears are transformed into zippers, chainsaws, motorcycles and fireworks, and the chimes morph into rainstorms, bells and pianos."

BEST IMAGINED SOUND

DESCRIBE A COMPELLING SOUND THAT DOESN'T YET EXIST

Alastair Hesp
UK

'The Chaos Of Recording Depression' (poem)

"I'm a poet and interdisciplinary artist, completing my MA at The Manchester Writing School," says Hesp. "I'm hugely influenced by the art world and electronic sounds, publishing poems about Aphex Twin and Luigi Russolo's 'The Art Of Noises'. I performed sound-poetry pieces in Berlin and exhibited poetry-sound installations in Copenhagen. My poem is about the unimaginable sound of depression. As a poet with bipolar disorder, this competition was an opportunity to centre a silenced subject, and equally to use poetry as illumination."

ELECTRIC BLUES

SOFT CELL

***Happiness Not Included**

BMG

In a 1981 Belgian TV interview, following a slightly jittery live studio performance of 'Where Did Our Love Go' amid a surreal assemblage of stage-set supermarket shopping trolleys, the French-accented presenter asks Marc Almond and Dave Ball a question that nails the essence of this inimitable, hugely influential duo, and which remains as apt now as it did back then – "How do you manage to be soulful with synthesisers?"

Almond's reply, after initially appearing giddy from the buzz of the performance, is composed and resolute, telling us everything we needed to know about Soft Cell, but also, in hindsight, explaining their enduring appeal. "Well, it just means putting a lot of heart into what you do, a lot of feeling, a lot of energy and a lot of fun," he says, faltering momentarily before adding with clarity, "and humour as well as everything else – we don't like approaching things with a straight-faced 'moderne', machine-age attitude." And that's the thing. That's why they were, and continue to be, so cool. Because they never really tried to be.

On the surface, Almond and Ball form an unlikely pair – Ball is the uncomplicated straight man, a counterpoint to Almond's florid performance dramas. Musically way more Suicide than Sparks, resolutely edgy and experimental, and the perfect foil to Almond's disarming, heart-on-sleeve verite, a man forever and forlornly "looking for love in sad songs".

In contrast, Ball never appears to give a monkey's. Expressively nonchalant but never arch or soi-disant, he appears more like a beery office worker at a works do in his trademark early-days tuxedo, looking on wryly at his willowy mate cavorting in frills and make-up. Perfect opposites.

And here they still are, reunited again and pretty much unchanged in attitude and approach, serving up their first new material in 20 years. The asterisk in '*Happiness Not Included' is purposeful, a commentary on the emptiness of the modern media landscape, and also an acknowledgement of imagined futures that for many, never quite materialised. The album's arrival also comes four decades after their classic 1981 breakthrough 'Non-Stop Erotic Cabaret', and is entirely consistent with the broader aesthetic that Almond and Ball first perfected in Leeds' grotty early 80s bedsit-land.

Indeed, '*Happiness Not Included' is shot through with many of the traits that people took to in droves all those years ago. The singular juxtaposition of light theatrics and subterranean darkness, droll observational misanthropy and gut-wrenching heartbreak, and the universal themes of love, longing and dreams, both lost and just out of reach.

The message this time around is that, despite everything you might see around you now, there is always hope, and that we must never give up on life's eternal quest for better times ahead.

So, even as Almond wallows in a slough of despondency above Ball's driving basslines and shimmering, evocative synth keys on lead track 'Bruises On My Illusions', delivering lyrics like "When every day is coloured in Soviet greys of sorrow / I'll hold on to my blues 'cos they'll only come back tomorrow", somehow we know it's just old Marc, over-dramatising. Though he does seek to reassure us as the track closes, with, "But time will heal all of my bruises / All my dreams can become reality", possibly conscious that we might be worrying, such is his nature.

Almond considers the track "a mini film-noir Soft Cell story, about a disillusioned character with everything against him or her, who still has hope". But he needn't explain, of course – it's a narrative we've heard many times from him, and which we'll never tire of.

On 'Heart Like Chernobyl', amid ebullient, emotive synths he opines, "All I have to say / The news has made me this way / Another horror every day / So on your knees and pray". Which might sound off-kilter and naive to any of us by today's standards, never mind to anyone young and quite possibly only acquainted with 'Tainted Love'.

But again, it's always been this way with Soft Cell. Look them up performing at Leeds nightclub Amnesia in the early 80s, penned in by a rapt audience of hip young new wave/new romantic devotees, and you'll hear the same tension between Ball's stern, complex electronic avant-gardism and Almond's instinctive desire to avoid pretension at all costs. "This is me," he's reiterating, "Take me as you find me." And what we find now, of course, after all the names, the slander, the near-death experiences and the heartbreak, is an icon and a hero.

CARL GRIFFIN

SOFT CELL*
*Happiness not included

EVERYTHING EVERYTHING
Raw Data Feel
EVERYTHING EVERYTHING

Always tweaking and experimenting, the sixth album by Everything Everything finds the Manchester art-popsters delving deeper into electronic territory. Rooted in modular synths and AI-generated lyrics, 'Raw Data Feel' is a thrilling ride into detailed songcraft and skittering, anthemic melodies. "You're in love with the future," sings Jonathan Higgs on the Kraftwerkian 'My Computer', the progressive sound of a band high on confidence, completely at ease with themselves. Could there be another Mercury Prize nomination in the offing? On this evidence, most certainly. **VI**

JOE RAINEY
Niineta
37D03D

Pow-wow is the distinctive singing performed by indigenous American communities, usually accompanied by driving percussion and performative dance. On his debut album, 'Niineta', Minneapolis-based singer Joe Rainey has worked with producer Andrew Broder to mix his pow-wow vocal style with ambient washes and an electronic pulse. On tracks such as 'Bezhigo' and 'ch. 1222', not only does Rainey strengthen his connection with this traditional music, but he captures something of America's mythic big skies and wide, open plains. **ST**

AUDIO OBSCURA VS BLACK SONAR
A Scream From Outer Space
SUBEXOTIC

Inspired by the 1977 launch of the Voyager space probes, Norfolk's Neil Stringfellow (Audio Obscura) joins Italian electronicists Alfonso Montagnese and Michael Facchini (Black Sonar) on a joint mission to evoke the loneliness of interstellar travel. 'Swimming In The Dust' combines soothing drones with samples from the probes' famous 'Golden Record', before gentle beats guide us further into the blackness. 'The Asteroid Belt' boasts gloriously discordant piano, and the unearthly swooshes of 'Dark Was The Night' are the distant rattle of analogue technology, lost in the void. **BF**

KEMPER NORTON
Estrenyon
ZONA WATUSA

'Estrenyon' continues Kemper Norton's travels through Cornwall's mythology, switching his gaze away from folklore and vestigial industries towards the numerous documented UFO sightings across England's most south-westerly county. Sonic inquisitiveness has become a hallmark of Kemper Norton's music, and the "slurtronic folk" sound artist is a master of sculpted, evocative narrative. With its looped field recordings and enveloping slow-motion melody, 'Sennen 1950' stands out here, the high point of possibly his finest album to date. **MS**

!!!
Let It Be Blue
WARP

An unwavering commitment to electronic exploration and good times finds New York's !!! as bouncy and restless as ever on album nine, which is stuffed with ideas, infectious beats and guest vocalists. It's quite a feat for a record to marry imperial phase Basement Jaxx grooves to elastic bass, as on 'A Little Bit (More)', and cover REM's 'Man On the Moon' with breathtakingly goofy disco swagger. But perhaps most astonishing is the transformation of 'This Is Pop 2' from Suicide-style noirish minimalism into a glorious kaleidoscopic onslaught. Party on. **AT**

FLOCK
Flock
STRUT

Flock are five artists from London's genre-pushing jazz/experimental scene, including percussionists Bex Burch and Sarathy Korwar, and in-demand synth man Danalogue, who describes their improvised recordings sessions as "murmurations". On the energetic 'Bold Dream', the fulsome bass of his Roland SH-09 signals the group's moment of flight, setting off a squawking saxophone and a heavy flourish of cymbals. When it ends, the entire band erupts into laughter, having clearly surprised themselves. 'Flock' is gloriously unpredictable, and you only hope there's more of this to come. **ILS**

STEFAN GOLDMANN
Vector Rituals
MACRO

German DJ and producer Stefan Goldmann is best known for his work in the minimal corner of techno, but here he appears to have reached a fork in the road. These seven tracks stay true to a sparse palette but map their grooves out via different matrices, creating subtly shifting time signatures. 'Tiksi' and 'Oyotung' set up a chugging momentum blurred by polyrhythmic tricks. More ambient moments like 'Lorino' and the album's opener'Nayba' are just as enthralling. Highly original, almost "minimal maximalist", don't let this one pass you by. **BW**

THESE SOUTHERN LANDS
Midnight Oil
BANDCAMP

These Southern Lands is Duncan Sutherland, a multi-instrumentalist and composer who splits his time between Glasgow and New York. With producer Kim Moore (aka WOLF) and musicians from Scottish street orchestra Nevis Ensemble, his debut album is a heartfelt meditation on climate change, full of "songs of love and loss on a dying planet". Combining experimental electronics with classical and acoustic elements, the effects are stirring, from the yearning violin, birdsong and droning machines on 'Lost For A Forest', to the synthpop leanings of 'Fun In Pink' and 'Hear Me'. **CF**

TORO Y MOI
Mahal
DEAD OCEANS

Still not acquainted with chillwave pioneer Chaz Bear (aka Toro Y Moi) and his laid-back, inventive and appealingly fuggy brand of future soul? Then start with 'Mahal', his groove-laden seventh album. Bay Area-residing Bear infuses everything he does with a bit of California sun, and that trait continues here. 'The Loop' nods to the likes of The Isley Brothers and Sly Stone, but 'Postman' is where it's really at, with a deliciously offbeat wonk that's just so funky. **CG**

RG ROUGH
70
BAM BALAM

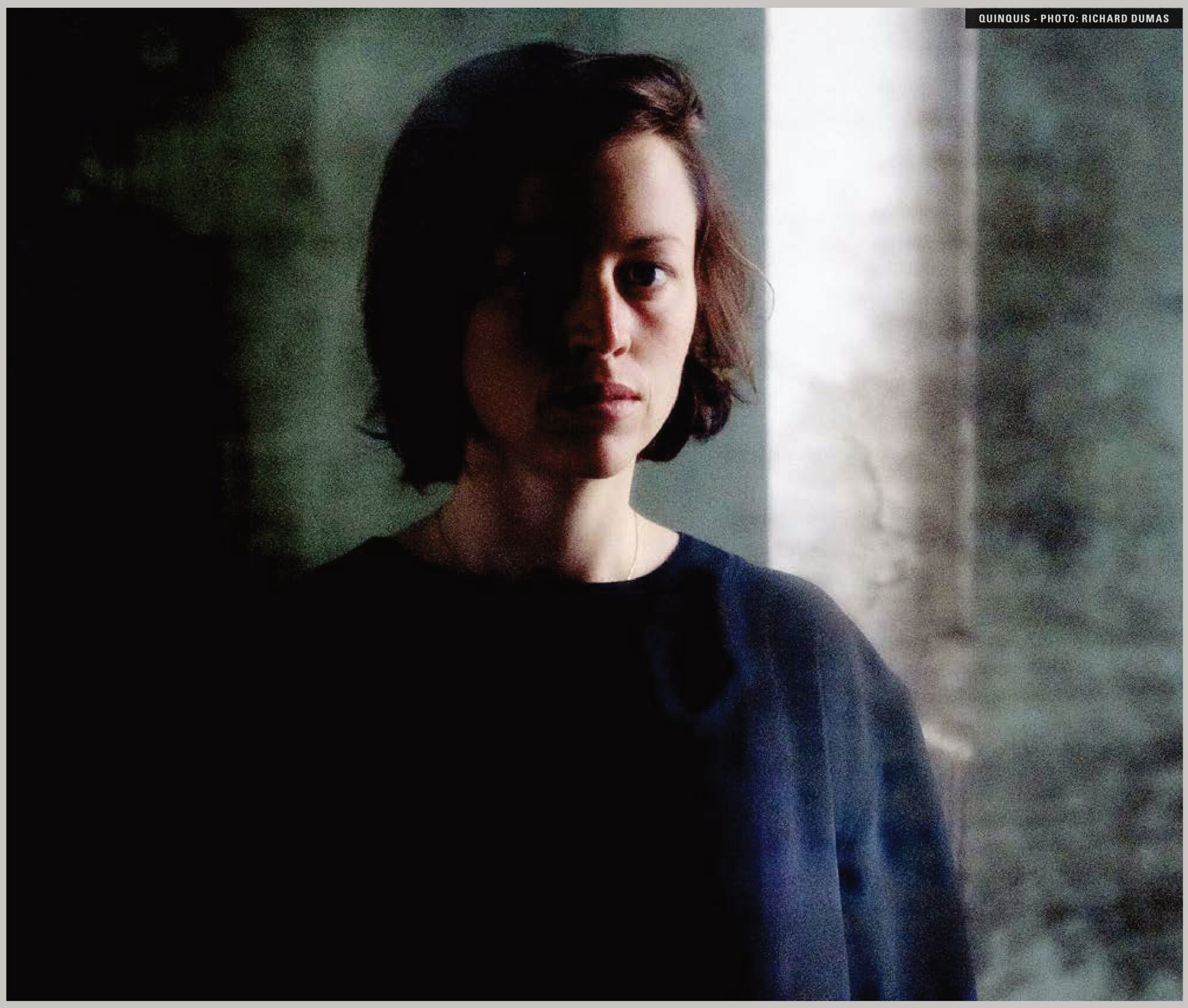
There's a rather intriguing lack of information accompanying this release, except to say its creator has vague links with Japanese psychedelic royalty Acid Mothers Temple. '70' is "a musical jigsaw made out of sounds from the 1970s" and is split into two 20-plus minute collages, '70 71 72 73 74' and yes, you guessed it,'75 76 77 78 79'. It's a parallel universe where Can's rhythmic chugging sidles up to Tangerine Dream's throbbing sequencers in an ever-moving patchwork quilt of familiar textures and sounds. The real 70s were never this much fun. **BW**

CIVILISTJÄVEL!
Järnnätter
FELT

Is there truth to the long-lost recordings backstory of Sweden's Civilistjävel!, or is it smoke and mirrors? This debut on Copenhagen's FELT label opens with the suffering metallic gasps of a rusty iron lung. Warm microbeats bring to mind the mouldy bass fuzz of 1990s B12 and Autechre. The vibraphonic lead of 'A2' slowly ushers in silken ambience, while the chuffing gas-brake electro of 'B4' is truly stunning. Backstory or no backstory, this is all smokable smoke and lickable mirrors. **FR**

ELIN
Secret Work
BANDCAMP

Once the shy guitarist with Teesside alt-folkers Dressed Like Wolves and post-rock dreamers Hold Music, Leeds' Maelin Brown has vanished inside a battered laptop, sending only this charming missive to an unfeeling world. 'il.ke' is the sound of a pulsing electronic heartbeat, and 'kocyu' the patter of radiophonic rain on a misted window. Two tracks are named after keyboard symbols, with '~' the fizzling highlight. Short, fragile and oddly moving, it's an album of tiny delights drenched in lonely melancholy. Music for long sighs, cold tea and half-eaten pikelets. **BF**



QUINQUIS - PHOTO: RICHARD DUMAS

QUINQUIS
SEIM
MUTE

Breton musician Émilie Tiersen has tapped into a rich seam of her own history on 'SEIM', her first as Quinquis. Based on the isle of Ushant, Tiersen is raising her child in her native Brythonic tongue, and that immersion in the language is the basis for this beautiful and beguiling collection of songs. Fusing sparse electronics, absorbing atmospherics and subtle melodies, it's also about inclusivity, especially among nationhoods with Celtic forebears – musician Ólavur Jákupsson sings in Faroese on 'Run', while endurance cyclist Emily Chappell reads in Welsh on 'Netra Ken'. Gorgeous. **JA**

ALAN SHEARER
Dark Is The Colour
FAVORITE RECORDINGS

While the English Alan Shearer was still popping zits on his face at Wallsend Boys Club, French Alan Shearer was arranging evocative instrumental synthpop on his Sequential Pro-One. The pseudonym of Frédéric Viger, his 1985 debut album 'Dark Is The Colour' just brims with infectious lo-fi/new wave energy. 'Nocturnal March' captures a rolling military beat punctuated with darting synth chords, while 'Sons Of The Snake' is a scintillatingly wibbly, Japan-like sound. A classic that needs a place in your collection. **ILS**

MYTHS AND MONSTERS
Cecaelia
BANDCAMP

It's like a mermaid, but with tentacles. We're unsure whether Lancashire's Steve Whiley has actually seen a Cecaelia on his walks around the Pendle countryside, but rural rambles and a love of mythology inspired this bombastic second album. He's in thrall to 1980s B-movies – 'Out Of Time' is surely the soundtrack to Kurt Russell blowing up a giant octopus – but there's playfulness, too. 'Porcelain Dolls' is Toytown horror, and 'Siren' boasts the ethereal vocals of enigmatic local folkie, Amber. Stridently good fun. **BF**

MACHINE BOY
Integrated Machineisms
SHOTGUN CHARLIE

Frenetic machine music here from Birmingham's Machine Boy, whose website is well worth a few moments of your time for its Knockabout Comics-indebted counterculture inkmanship. The music has a similar cartoonish headrush madness to it, as 'HeadZ' jitters away like the shaky lines of Keith Haring's figures. It's all constantly in motion, stripped down to minimalist brutality, but with moments of prettiness too, like the quirky 'Integrate' and the tuneful if jerky 'Pacer'. Exhausting but likeable, or in MB's own words, "Stoopid… but real". **MR**

ALANAS CHOSNAU & MARK REEDER - PHOTO: MARTYN GOODACRE

ALANAS CHOSNAU & MARK REEDER

Life Everywhere

MFS

Chosnau and Reeder create a bleak romance, both for the lads-in-long-coats electronic music of the 1980s, and for the relief of geopolitical angst via the dancefloor. At times it could serve as an alternative soundtrack to Channel 4's nostalgic 'Deutschland 83', with the synths and driving drum machine pulses of 'I Wonder', or a Euro-electro and rain-soaked 'Hotel California' with the opener 'Why?', while the more thrusting 'All You Need To Love' and the Moroder-esque title track turn up the sex-o-meter. Life everywhere? Life in Berlin, for sure. **MR**

MESADORM

Pollinator

BABYLEGS RECORDS

The follow-up to 2018's impressive debut 'Heterogaster' sees Blythe Pepino and company delve further into the netherworld between electronic pop and in-yer-face experimental production. The bouncing single 'Soap Opera' nods gratefully toward Dirty Projectors but remains doomed to entropy, while the tender 'Every Breath (A Journey Of Loving you)' weaves clever vocal harmonies around syncopated beats and staccato strings. Pepino can sure pen a lyric, too. Smart and accomplished, repeat listens will be rewarded. **WS**

SCALPING

Void

HOUNDSTOOTH

The world is a frightening place right now, so Scalping are partying like it's literally 1999. The Bristol noiseniks have taken their time with this debut, but 'Void' certainly delivers on the hype, creating a whole world of underground hipster resistance with a distinctly nu-retro vibe. 'Tether' (featuring Californian rapper, DÆMON) could have been lifted from a soundtrack about cyberpunk hackers, while 'Silhouettes' feels like an early 2000s public service announcement, as the words, "You wouldn't steal a car…" feel like they're flashing before your eyes in large stencil font. **JA**

OCH

Pö Om Pö

ROCKET RECORDINGS

Those susceptible to hypnagogic hallucinations will be familiar with the headspace of this darkly psychedelic album. Thankfully, it doesn't come with free giant spiders for your headboard, but apparitions of Cluster clearly haunt the bedroom ceiling of this enigmatic Swedish combo. The opener 'Bolid' kicks us straight into dream territory with a drone-fuelled groove, while 'Silverstjärnan' adds church organs and a ton of wah-wah. And 'Bråviken' is perhaps the most terrifying wigout ever to be named after a small bay on the Baltic Sea. Glorious, but leave a night light on. **BF**

3DDANCER
New Exciting Toys
BANDCAMP

On the back of Berlin's Modular Gang synth parties, run by 3Ddancer's Rachel Lyn, is this second live album of shuddering warehouse techno from the trio of Lyn, Alex The Fairy and Volruptus. In an epic four-hour set, rusted synths pound the dancefloor with little let-up. So much dirty electro. Depraved acid lines catherine-wheel over industrial rhythms. At one point, beefcake single 'Botanical Sports' deflates in a balloon fart of its own eroded ecstasy, the comedown of an all-night DJ marathon. Phew! **FR**

VARIOUS ARTISTS
Ritual Variations
ROOM40

'Ritual Variations' features eight reworks of LA drone artist Robert Takahashi Crouch's 'A Ritual', a 20-minute track from his 2021 album 'Jubilee'. This eclectic collection really adds something new to the original composition, with imaginative rerubs coming from Lawrence English and Crouch's own partner, Yann Novak, whose dank distortions on the '2C-D + Methylone Mix' are indeed heady. Pick of the bunch is Marcus Fischer's 'Mirror Ritual', an exquisite piece of sound design that morphs compellingly between celestial organ drifts and decaying sonics. **ILS**

LINNÉA TALP
Arch Of Motion
THANATOSIS

For 'Arch Of Motion', Stockholm's Linnéa Talp uses various church organs and a Buchla modular system to develop eight pieces, each one inspired by "slow and simple movements". When you tune into the microtonal vibrations of 'Mending (Light Pressure)' and 'To Whom', you're ushered into a meditative flow state similar to that offered by Pauline Oliveros' 'Deep Listening'. Christer Bothén's clarinet on the sparse 'The Continuation' provides additional richness to Talp's euphoric drones, concluding an album of calming, beatific oscillations. **MS**

HUN HUN
Y Bab Adöy
LURID MUSIC

Brussels-born brothers Jimmy and Noé Moens have taken their love of retro electronica and given it a psychedelic twist, largely inspired by trips to Istanbul and Tangiers in 2018. 'Y Bab Adöy' springs from a deep interest in Arab cultures and old Turkish B-movies, crossing over with American B-movies made by John Carpenter. Made with a DIY sparseness, tracks like the opener 'Princess Maria' are infused with cinematic ambition, and filmic samples permeate 'Göktürk', commingling in a charming mix of raw, acoustic percussion and analogue synths. **JA**

FLOATING WORLD PICTURES
The Twenty-Three Views
FRIENDLY RECORDINGS

From the cultured hands of Snapped Ankles' Chestnutt and sound artist Raimund Wong comes this inventive and exquisitely composed deep listening triumph. Recorded with a stellar cast of leading future jazz masters – including Alabaster DePlume and The Comet Is Coming's Danalogue – these are dazzling world music meditations, touching on Balinese gamelan and Indian raga. The remarkable 'Salt-Wind Rises At The Waterfront Promenade' is a high point, carrying Jon Hassell's "fourth world" experimentalism forward in extraordinary ways. **CG**

SARA DZIRI
Close To Home
OPTIMO MUSIC

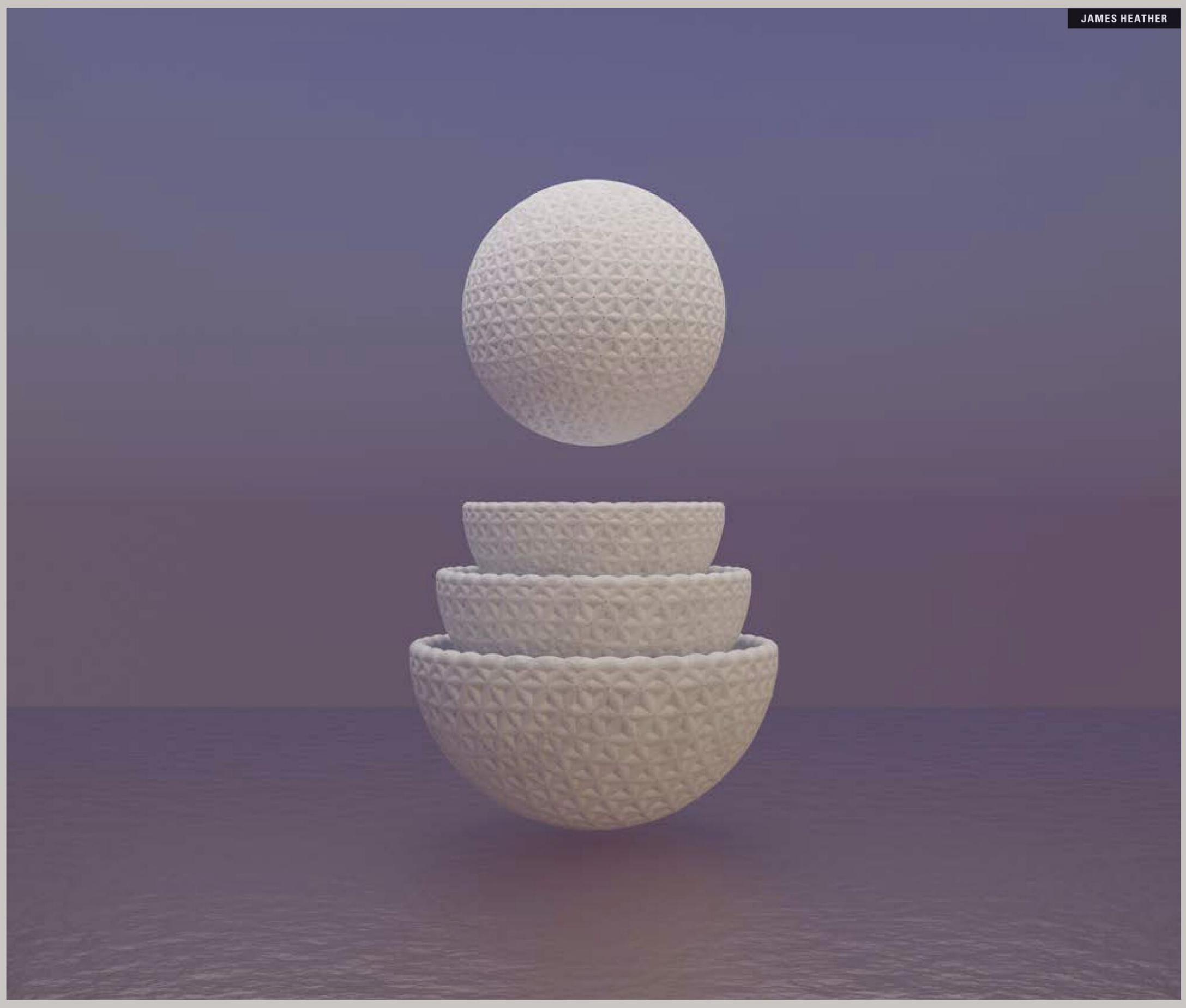
A dual Belgian-Tunisian heritage informs this debut album from Brussels DJ Sara Dziri. Snaking acid house and head-nodding techno would be enough. Big fat synths? Box ticked. But its Arabic elements elevate everything. North African chord meandering and evocative qanun pulls us across the Mediterranean. And the singing tops it off. Triumphant in the euphoria of closing track 'Kan Ya Makan', it's as if Natacha Atlas has been parachuted in as guest narrator. What an album. **FR**

SOCCER96
Inner Worlds
MOSHI MOSHI

London duo Dan "Danalogue" Leavers and Max "Betamax" Hallett (aka The Comet Is Coming) just go from strength to strength. Their latest offering as Soccer96 is an electronic, jazz-infused and FX-laden groove of "spiritual combat music", as Danalogue's synths and cosmic flourishes weave tantalisingly around Betamax's dynamic drum patterns. Meditative, psychedelic and exhilarating, it's most compelling on the Cluster-like 'Inner Worlds, Outer Worlds' and the woozily soulful 'Gatekeepers', voiced by Rozi Plain. Downright essential. **VI**

HYDROPLANE
Hydroplane
EFFICIENT SPACE

Named after what Dean Wareham had originally intended to call his post-Galaxie 500 outfit, Luna, it's not surprising that Melbourne dreampoppers Hydroplane have some sonic overlap. While tracks such as 'Wurlitzer Jukebox' recall Galaxie 500, their 1997 debut album was far weirder on the whole – as this reissue reveals. 'I Hear A New World' conceals doom under a lo-fi rumble, while 'House Warming' shrouds Kerrie Bolton's empyreal voice and seemingly innocent narrative in a sinister heat haze, like a lost episode of 'Neighbours' directed by Peter Weir. **ST**



JAMES HEATHER
Invisible Forces
AHEAD OF OUR TIME

Many a promising new artist's potentially difficult second album is billed as "highly anticipated", but James Heather's 'Invisible Forces' is undeniably so. Following up 2017's 'Stories From Far Away On Piano', the London-based neoclassical pianist and composer again delivers an incredibly accomplished and elegant work, meditating on the titular energies that connect us to the world and each other. It's hard to pick a standout track, but the emotive warmth of 'In Your Spirit' has an enveloping richness that's truly fortifying in these troubled times. Indispensable. **CG**

DAVID LEE MYERS
Xenography
PULSEWIDTH

The term xenography is apparently verbalisation in a language unknown to the speaker, and this album from New York's David Lee Myers certainly operates in musical languages that stray a long way from the normal path. From the bubbly rising steam of opening track 'Xenography I' through to 'Xenography V', which is not unlike the cataclysmic sound of glaciers collapsing into the sea, it makes extensive use of feedback and hyper-processing techniques to create an ocean of pulses and searing notes. A pretty challenging listen, but one that mainly rewards the effort. **BW**

BROWN FANG
Sherwood Pines
NUNORTHERN SOUL

Blissful, elegant instrumentals from a new Nottingham duo. Underpinned by cyclical electronics, Henry Scott's crystalline guitar weaves arabesques, while seasoned bassist John Thompson adds soul and grace. 'Sherwood Pines' bathes us in the glow of an eternal sunset and this crepuscular magic pervades opening track 'Tracing Paper'. But rather than dwelling in semi-darkness, Brown Fang gravitate towards the light, as on the burbling effervescence of 'Fridgewords' and the spacey, propulsive 'Goodbye Donkey Jacket'. Much-needed comfort for a fucked-up world. **SB**

GAUDI
Sub Signals Vol 2
DUBMISSION

Fifteen years after his first 'Sub Signals' compilation for the cult Canadian label Interchill, London dub maestro Gaudi brings his singular production sound to this second volume of "pure bass therapy". A 75-minute mix featuring a treasure trove of unreleased originals from the likes of The Orb, Dub FX and Groove Armada, alongside vibrant tracks from underground artists, every minute here is total gold. From David Harrow's beautifully wavy 'In My Head (Inside My Head Mix)' to the saw-edged effects of 3head's 'Afnaz (Dennis Bovell Dub Mix)', Gaudi still has the Midas touch. **CF**

KIKAGAKU MOYO - PHOTO: JAMIE WDZIEKONSKI

KIKAGAKU MOYO

Kumoya Island

GURUGURU BRAIN

Mixed emotions will be felt by admirers of these compelling electro-hippies. After announcing the release of this album and its accompanying tour, the Tokyo five-piece also confirmed that 'Kumoya Island' would be their final release. They've built a devoted following since the release of their self-titled 2013 debut, channelling lysergic, late-1960s hues, prog, classic Turkish psych, 1970s pastoral kosmiche, 1990s baggy (think Stone Roses and Ride) and an exotic, unhurried beatitude that's entirely their own.

'Kumoya Island' takes its time to lure us into its mesmerising grasp, but a few tracks in and we're suddenly enveloped by the standout 'Meu Mar', a warmly seductive, melodic and beguiling beauty that unexpectedly builds to a stupefying crescendo.

Further on, the bass-driven, ambient-tropical 'Daydream Soda' dazzles, before the evocative closer 'Maison Silk Road' waves an enigmatic goodbye as the band disappear into the shimmering sunset haze for the final time. **CG**

PENGUIN CAFE

A Matter of Life... 2021

ERASED TAPES

Whether you're revisiting Penguin Cafe's 2011 album or encountering it for the first time, it's impossible not be charmed by this 10th anniversary reissue. Penguin Cafe were formed by Arthur Jeffes, son of Simon Jeffes and Emily Young, as a continuation of his late father's avant-pop project, the Penguin Cafe Orchestra. From the outset, the buoyant piano and stirring strings of 'That, Not That' mark this as an emotive journey, as Arthur Jeffes' explorative ensemble tug at heartstrings with their unique folktronica-meets-classical sound.

The rhythmic undulations of the beautiful 'Sundog' are cheerful enough to wrest a smile from the dourest of souls, while 'The Fox And The Leopard' twinkles with ukulele flourishes that Marie Kondo would certainly agree spark joy. On the more moody 'Finland' and 'Coriolis', Penguin Cafe's expansive palette of instruments paint soundscapes that are contemplative but never maudlin. But the jewel in the crown is 'Harry Piers', a brand-new recording of the song Arthur wrote for his father, that manages in its touching piano-driven melody to capture the rousing spirit of both PCO and Penguin Cafe. **CF**

OKSANA LINDE

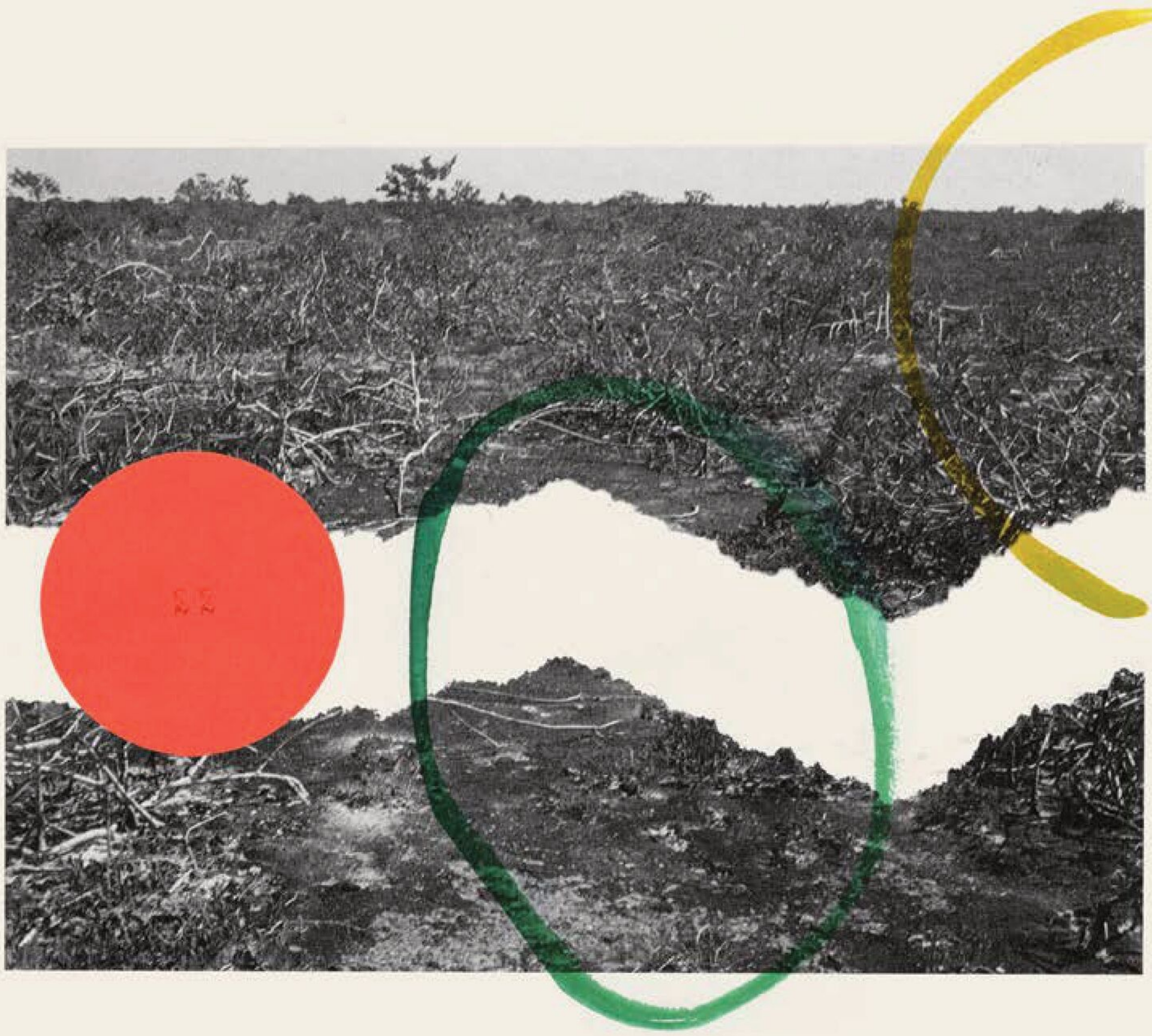
Aquatic And Other Worlds

BUH

The Venezuelan Delia Derbyshire, anyone? That's the buzz, but this collection of joyous 1980s recordings has more in common with the work of melodic Moog-ticklers like Wendy Carlos or Isao Tomita. Born in Caracas to a Ukrainian family, Linde gave up her day job in 1981 and devoted herself to electronic composition with a borrowed Polymoog and a reel-to-reel recorder. And blimey, she made some great stuff. 'Viaje Hacia La Luz' is a monolithic slab of anthemic devotions. 'Playa Caribe' is a lesson in gentle grooviness, a carefree evocation of sun-baked island paradise.

Only one track here has enjoyed any kind of previous release – 'Mariposas Acuáticas', a playful homage to Latin butterflies, appeared on a long-lost 1985 French compilation. This is the first-ever commercial collection of her recordings, and – at the age of 74 – she deserves heartfelt appreciation for music that positively teems with ebullience. Pour a glass of pop, skip straight to 'Psicocatálisis' and crack a bloody smile. It's nearly summer. **BF**

HIROKI TAKAHASHI



HIROKI TAKAHASHI

Paleozoic

DAUW

If the fractured state of the world is making you weary, 'Paleozoic' is the perfect antidote to all that stress and uncertainty. Producer Hiroki Takahashi – who has previously made music as part of the Japanese live electronic trio, Atoris – takes inspiration from the flourishing evolutionary stages of the Paleozoic era on this solo effort, and his graceful compositions reflect the wonder and promise of that prehistoric period on Earth when plants and reptiles began moving from the sea to the land.

The soothing chimes and glittering electronic reverberations of opener 'Drift' are a balm for the soul, while 'Lagoon' similarly feels like a sound bath, full of gently bubbling notes and shimmering synth work. 'Shadows' takes a more subdued and contemplative turn, and closing track 'Fluctuation' sweeps and yearns as if mirroring the climax of Paleozoic times, which ended with the greatest extinction event in Earth's history. Our world may be in constant flux, but Takahashi urges us to hear the beauty within the circle of life. **CF**

NIGHTPORTS W/ TOM HERBERT

Nightports W/ Tom Herbert

THE LEAF LABEL

Nightports is Adam Martin and Mark Slater's collaborative project that seeks to push creative restrictions to the extreme – the Leeds duo produce entire albums from recording sessions of just one musician playing their instrument.

This third edition features Polar Bear bassist Tom Herbert, and will leave you scratching your head. How do the pair generate the industrial noise of 'Hydrodynamica', or the dreamy Nils Frahm-esque, neoclassical vibes of 'Vacancy', purely from the sound of Herbert plucking his double bass?

But the most stirring emotions are translated through more minimalist cuts. 'Eye To Eye' features Arthur Russell-like fragments, with a reverberating bass solo and cello-sounding swipes, while 'Space Layer' is like an electrified version of Moroccan Mahmoud Guinia's spiritual Gnawa music. You fully understand what Herbert is alluding to when he says the album is "how I imagine I sound in my dreams". Like all good concept albums, 'Nightports w/ Tom Herbert' eclipses the idea that birthed it. **ILS**

ROGER ENO

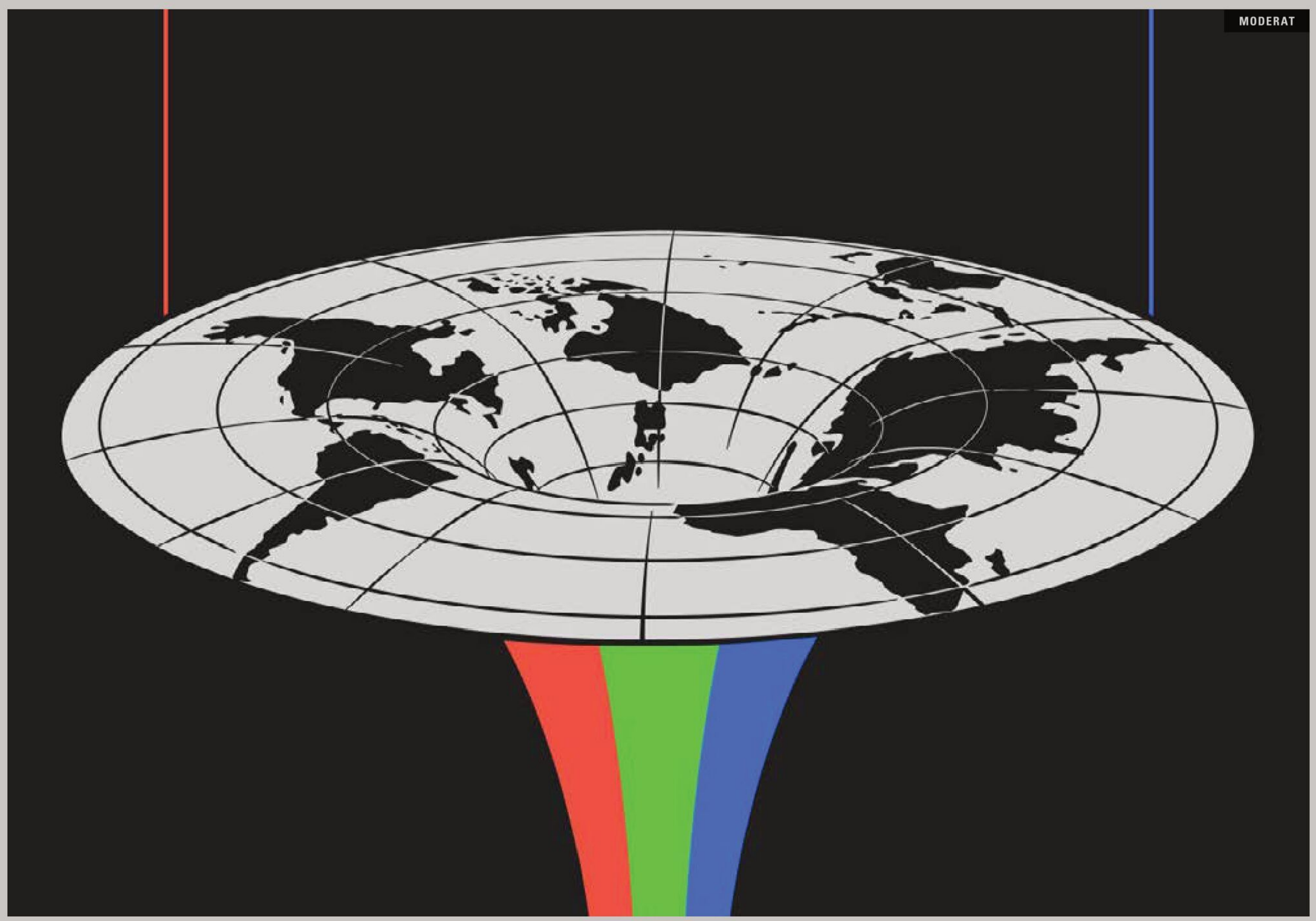
The Turning Year

DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON

'The Turning Year' finds composer and pianist Roger Eno at his most emotionally devastating. While it's easy to imagine gazing out upon the pastoral setting in which Eno composes, the resonance of these pieces is universal. The sentiment is not necessarily regretful, but realistic, offering a perspective on life's unalterable journey.

On 'A Place We Once Walked', we notice that a ruminative piano melody has become momentarily uncertain. Should we feel joy or sadness? Or, in the constant upheaval of our lives, will we be forever caught between both?

On 'Innocence' and on the title track, Eno is at his most affecting. Despite these tracks being freighted with a hopeful, uplifting quality, there is a brutal plaintiveness, like alighting upon a book inscription you wrote to your children and realising how much time has slipped away. To create an album that can leave you as subtly altered as 'The Turning Year' is a testament to Eno's extraordinary compositional gift. **MS**



MODERAT
MORE D4TA
MONKEYTOWN

Sure, it's been documented before, but rarely has the hinterland of 4am neon, rain-lashed windows and dread been captured with such emotional impact as on Moderat's latest. 'MORE D4TA', the fourth studio album from the Berlin-based trio – Modeselektor's Gernot Bronsert and Sebastian Szary, and Apparat's Sascha Ring – is reminiscent of a travelogue of 21st century urbanity, a dazzling, dizzying ride through the heart of the city, exploring its dank alleyways and neon-lit dives.

Its range of sounds and textures is almost overwhelming, from filmic 1980s electronic throbs ('Numb Bell'), epic doominess ('Fast Land') and twisted, uplifting anthems ('Neon Rats' and 'Easy Prey') to the James Blake-like minimal beats and soulful vocoder vocals of 'Copy Copy'.

The fact that Moderat are doing this at all after six years away – and two years of no communication whatsoever – feels astonishing. That they've created an album this enthralling, celebrating the dark side of the city, is nothing short of a miracle. **AT**

BURNT FRIEDMAN & JOÃO PAIS FILIPE
Automatic Music Vol 1: Mechanics Of Waving
NONPLACE

'Automatic Music Vol 1' reunites Germany's Burnt Friedman and Portugal's João Pais Filipe, purveyors of distinctive electronics and complex polyrhythms. Since their first collaboration in 2019, the dextrous Filipe has slotted into the chasm left behind by Friedman's former muse, Can drummer Jaki Liebezeit. Since then, the pair have produced a series of releases that highlight how symbiotic their connection is.

Friedman is a musician who respects the significance of rhythm, unobtrusively weaving his sounds and effects through and around Filipe's percussive workouts. On opening track '21-130', Friedman's role is one of extreme subtlety until the extended fade, where you hear him stepping out from behind Filipe's joyous African/Latin beats.

His presence is more obviously felt on the effervescent '18-140', layering urgent acid flourishes, backward sounds and vocal textures around energetic percussion. These are tracks that evolve gently, never sitting still for long, commanding the listener's full attention. **MS**

JIMI TENOR
Multiversum
BUREAU B

'Multiversum' sounds like a 'Spider-Man' film translated into Latin. But despite being named after a tenor saxophone, Jimi Tenor has never been that niche. The jazz flows freely on this expansive new work for Bureau B, with the spaced-out lounge and top-buttoned electro jams we've come to expect from everyone's favourite Finnish flute fiddler.

Each track is painted in wide, tasty arcs of melody – think Jackson Pollock ketchupping a hotdog. Tenor's pared-down set-up means his instrument is ever more present, cruising the notes with giddy abandon.

Despite the freeform style, the percussion is notably machine-driven. This means oodles of laser-fired drum fills and skittering woodpecker funk. The radiophonic bubbles on 'Bad Trip Good' are a joy. And, of course, we have his slightly sleazy vocals, extolling the virtues of skinny dipping on 'Birthday Magic' and hedonism on the super-catchy 'Life Hugger'. Boy's got a twinkle in his eye and we love him for it. **FR**

GHOST POWER

Ghost Power

DUOPHONIC SUPER 45S

Tim Gane gets his groove on

Stand by for action! If the opening clatter of this gloriously daffy album doesn't make you think of some long-lost 'Thunderbirds' spin-off, with jerky Tim Gane and Jeremy Novak puppets waiting to be launched into the pop stratosphere in a rocket made from 1960s cornflakes packets, then you're clearly in the pay of The Hood. Or whichever dastardly arch-villain is attempting to stamp out such life-affirming musical missions from their secret base inside a dormant volcano.

Imagine Barry Gray joining the Radiophonic Workshop in 1965 and asking Dick Mills to beef up his barking, brassy theme tunes with backwards tape loops of bubbles being blown through glasses of Corona Cream Soda. Yep, it's that good. The album opener 'Asteroid Witch' – released as a single back in 2020 – is the call to arms here, its 'Joe 90' bassline punching through waves of twangy guitars, fearless paradiddles and the strident parping of some ancient studio organ. Was there ever a 'Thunderbirds' hero called Vox Continental? There should have been.

From there onwards, it's spy movie madness galore. Gane and Novak, of course, both have previous form in boldly battling the forces of dullness. Gane with Stereolab and, latterly, Cavern Of Anti-Matter, whose 2018 soundtrack to Peter Strickland's 'In Fabric' now feels like Ghost Power's moodier older brother. Novak, meanwhile, was one-half of 1990s US retro-futurists Dymaxion. They claim to have largely worked remotely, in Berlin and New York respectively, but it's hard to hear heroic anthems like 'Lithic Fragment' and 'Panic In The Isles Of Splendour' without imagining the pair of them kicking back in adjacent egg chairs, sipping daytime Martinis in close proximity to a wide selection of black polo necks.

The fun literally never stops. 'Zome Primer' boasts seductive harpsichords. Is there any other kind of harpischord? 'Vertical Section' is a riot of sexy, squelchy synths. And the 15-minute finale, 'Astral Melancholy Suite', soundtracks an epic journey through deep space via Joe Meek's 'I Hear A New World' and a blanket of vintage bleeps and swirls that gently fade into cosmic oblivion. It's a curiously touching conclusion to an album of unalloyed delights. Ghost Power are GO!

BOB FISCHER

Brief Encounters

Ghost Power's **Tim Gane** tunes in to the quick-fire question machine

Where are you right now and what can you see?

"I'm at home in Berlin sitting at the table, looking out the window. There are hail storms."

Your Ghost Power partner is Jeremy Novak, whose band Dymaxion were often compared to Stereolab. How did you meet?

"I'd been a fan of Dymaxion from their very first records. We asked them to support us in New York in the mid-90s, and they went on to open up for us at every gig we played for the next 10 years or so. We share a lot of similar interests, but I don't think we sound similar – at least I don't hear it really."

So this collaboration has been some time in the making?

"It's fair to say this LP was started a long time ago, around 2007-08. We worked on it on and off until three or four years ago, and then the release was delayed by 18 months due to busy vinyl pressing plants and Covid."

What/who would you say are the major influences on the Ghost Power sound?

"General thrift store record-buying, one brilliant track on an appalling album, unusual combinations that shouldn't work… and don't."

The drum sounds are pretty epic…

"The drum sound is killer! It's Jeremy's personal way to build up drum tracks – they're made on a computer from the early 90s. He made the Dymaxion drums in the same way and with the same equipment. It's a unique sound which was the bedrock of the LP."

There's also a proper 'Thunderbirds'/'Joe 90' vibe… you're Gerry Anderson/Barry Gray fans, right?

"I am a completely crazy fan. It's some of the most exciting music ever made. Although Jeremy didn't grow up with the Gerry Anderson shows in the same way, I know he loves them too."

What sort of impact did television, and music on TV, have on you growing up?

"Massive! The first music I loved came from programmes I only watched *because* I loved the music. Our television had a DIN socket which I could connect a cassette recorder to and tape music off it. This was around 1978, just before I discovered John Peel, which eventually took over, but I carried on taping music from the TV well into the 80s."

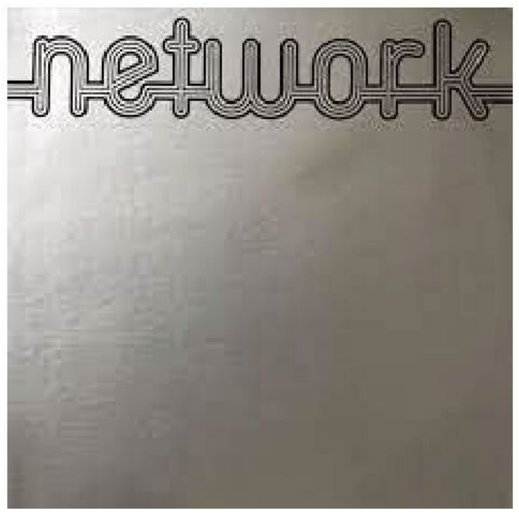
Any shows, theme tunes or soundtracks that have especially stayed with you?

"All the obvious ones – 'Doctor Who', 'The Tomorrow People', John Barry stuff like 'The Persuaders' and 'The Adventurer', Barry Gray we've mentioned already, Edwin Astley and Ron Grainer. I remember seeing 'Journey To The Center Of The Earth' when I was about 10, with the Bernard Herrmann score, and I really loved the sound when they went down into the cave. The Morricone spaghetti westerns really blew my mind – the opening sequence to 'The Good, The Bad And The Ugly' is still so fantastic."

Given the choice, which 'Thunderbirds' vehicle would you pilot?

"I can't drive, I don't like flying and I'm also claustrophobic, so I would probably just sit by the pool."

Buried Treasure



CRAIG PALMER

Industrial – Volume 26

NETWORK PRODUCTION MUSIC, 1983

At some point, the entertainment industry will have to relax its choke-hold on 1980s nostalgia. They'll finally realise that video arcades aren't coming back, that the £150 million used to produce 'Wonder Woman 1984' could have fed legions, and that Matthew Broderick now looks more like a well-padded university professor than a member of the Brat Pack. Still, until that occurs, it's worth noting that a fair portion of today's hipper sounds can be plumbed right back to the library music of that decade.

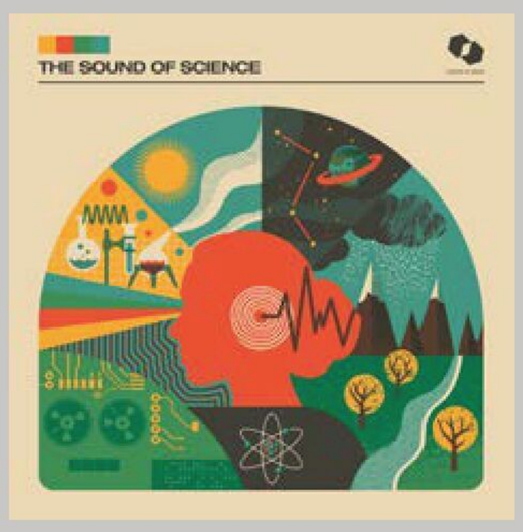
Take the work of Craig Palmer, for instance. The Californian pianist got his start working with American TV host Regis Philbin and pop/rock crooner Gary Puckett, before going on to record a shedload of compositions that underpinned scores of sports programmes and adverts. By the time synths had become a commonplace production tool, his electronic arrangements were the kind of top-shelf commercial stuff that was highly in demand.

Which is exactly how I came across his work. In the middle of putting together a small film for a presentation, several hours deep into hunting through vintage library music to get a suitable 80s vibe without much luck, I discovered 'Byte By Byte', a track Palmer had put together in 1983. It was a very "huzzah" moment, but before I could start patting myself on the back, a colleague chirped up and said, "Oh, I know that tune!". What?

As it turned out, 'Byte By Byte' had been employed as the theme tune for 'Computer Chronicles', a pioneering American public television show where the computer-curious tuned in for pre-internet information on whatever was currently riding the PC wave. The track's gurgling analogue intro is accompanied by the kind of lovely polysynth horns that would also eventually propel Chicago house music. 'Byte By Byte' appeared on the 'Industrial – Volume 26' album, which also featured 'Electric Rain', a track that feels like it could have been directly lifted from Wendy Carlos' soundtrack to the original 'Tron' film. 'Data Bank', meanwhile, projects the vibe of a tear-jerking, John Hughes-style cinematic love scene, and 'Mission Control' brings on the sort of tension you might get from a thrilling Olympics montage or during the opening titles of an old-school police drama.

Originally part of the WhisperDisc series from the Network Production Music label, the collection can also be found on most streaming platforms under the title 'Technology Age' by the Network Music Ensemble. Under either moniker, however, Palmer's workmanlike output is a thread that both the synthwave and vaporwave kids of today tug on vigorously.

JOE SILVA



THE SOUND OF SCIENCE

The Sound Of Science

CASTLES IN SPACE

Dean Honer and chums go back to school

What is 'The Sound Of Science', exactly? Well, if you're Sheffield's Dean Honer and Essex-based songwriter Kevin Pearce, it's the soundtrack from their science show for children and adults. But this isn't just any old boring science show.

You will know Honer, of course, from The All Seeing I, I Monster, The Moonlandingz, The Eccentronic Research Council and International Teachers Of Pop, and as a producer for The Human League and Róisín Murphy, so you'll have an inkling of what to expect from 'The Sound Of Science' as he puts all his knob-twiddling nous to excellent use.

First, a bit of context. As a parent, Honer endured his fair share of "cliched and awful children's songs that attempted to combine education and entertainment". Here, roping in his old pal Pearce, he sets out to liven things up with his own curriculum – "informative songs and music" that are "appealing and bearable". The result? Imagine an educational science class presented by Kraftwerk and the Radiophonic Workshop, and you're getting halfway close.

Taken from immersive live shows first performed by Honer, Pearce and cohorts back in 2018, complete with experiments and 3D visuals, 'The Sound Of Science' is typically well-crafted. Honer's heady electronics combine with Pearce's folk sensibilities – most notably on 'The Water Cycle' – as various spoken interjections and facts (touching on atoms, the speed of light and more) convey a scientific "sense of wonder". That it all somehow harks back to "oddball" children's telly programmes and public information films from the 1960s and 70s is no accident, a feeling exacerbated by designer Nick Taylor's colourful and informative insert art, like the pages of an old Ladybird book.

It's mostly Honer's whizzy tricks and catchy rhythms that propel everything along. Opener 'Photosynthesis' is pure joy, as guest vocalist Liza Violet sings of "fantastic green machines" while zippy synths noodle away. Set to a nagging electro backdrop, 'These Are The Elements' rattles along ("Silicon, Phosphorous, Sulphur…") in a delightfully stentorian vocoded stylee. Even 'Global Warming', warning of the dangers of greenhouse gases, is ameliorated by charming and scintillating analogue electronica.

With their original touring schedule derailed by the pandemic, Honer and Pearce hope to take 'The Sound Of Science' out on the road again later this year. If this dazzling and enlightening album is anything to go by, it promises to be quite the lesson.

VELIMIR ILIC

CLAIRE ROUSAY
Everything Perfect Is Already Here
SHELTER PRESS

Often when a track is built around swathes of samples and snippets of found sound, it can create an evocative sense of place, but tells the listener little about the artist moving through it. On 'Everything Perfect Is Already Here', Texan musician Claire Rousay opts for stillness. The sounds feel as though they are occurring around her and, as they wash into waves of violin and synths, it conjures a kind of emotional synaesthesia, merging the feeling of these instrumental arrangements into the ambient clutter of the room.

'Everything Perfect…' comprises two long-form sonic collages. 'It Feels Foolish To Care' begins with halting speech, like the embers of a conversation drowned out by bittersweet piano and strings, while the title track presents a piece of dialogue captured intact but quiet, as though Rousay is recording it outside her window. Rather than diminishing the intimacy, it is magnified, matched by the poignancy of the delicate electronics which surround it. **ST**

X MARKS THE PEDWALK
New / End
MESHWORK

X Marks The Pedwalk haven't just outlasted most of their 80s and 90s EBM contemporaries. They've outpaced, outsmarted and outclassed them too. And by quite some measure.

'New / End' – ooh, cryptic, what's that all about then? – has the same sort of vibe as the German group's 'Transformation' album from a couple of years back. There was lots to like then and there's lots to like now. It's slinky and often sexy stuff, the melodies radiant, the basslines rolling, the lyrics both teasing and scaring. Which is a bit unnerving, but then XMTP did nick their name from the title of a particularly oddball Fritz Lieber short story.

'Sailors At Dawn' and 'Kill Me Tonight' are two of the picks. The first is a catchy synthpop sea shanty, the second a bucking mech-funk monster. 'Sacred Ground' and 'Firestorm' are less urgent but by no means lacking in drama, while 'Into The Light' is an absolute corker, carefully building into a mesmeric, euphoric, life-affirming frug. Pitch it down a little and it's like being at a new beat club in Belgium in 1988. Most likely Boccaccio.

'Transformation' was a really good record but 'New / End' – erm, no, still have no idea – is even better. If XMTP carry on like this, they'll peak in around 2050. You're advised to get in early. **P**

HELDON
Antelast
BAM BALAM

Between 1974 and 1978, Richard Pinhas pioneered new possibilities in sound with his band Heldon, fusing nascent electronic music with experimental space rock that often veered into free jazz. The Frenchman's place in the pantheon is assured, if Pinhas' collaborations are anything to go by, recording with everyone from French philosopher Gilles Deleuze to Japanese noise legend Merzbow.

With 'Antelast', he delivers what might be Heldon's final album, a startling facsimile of the French band's imperial phase, when Pinhas took the studio roof off with the help of keyboardist Patrick Gauthier and drummer François Auger.

'Antelast One' is built in the image of 1977's 'Interface' which, to use an aphorism beloved of 1990s' music journalists, sounds like a flight of stairs falling down a flight of stairs. With Arthur Nancy and Florian Tatard along for the ride, Pinhas takes us on a bumpy yet euphoric trip one last time, with 'Antelast Three' personifying the same live studio magic that 'Un Rêve Sans Conséquence Spéciale' captured way back in 1976. **JA**

ZOLA JESUS

Arkhon

SACRED BONES

The searing operatic voice of Nika Roza Danilova, aka Zola Jesus, still stands alone in the left-field arena, as it has done since the launch of her 2009 debut album, 'The Spoils'. The long stretch since the release of 2017's 'Okovi' is explained by a bout of writer's block, which she banished after reaching out to renowned producer Randall Dunn (Sunn O))), Jóhann Jóhannsson) and drumming percussionist Matt Chamberlain, who's worked with the likes of Bowie, Dylan and Fiona Apple. A wise move, on this evidence.

Chamberlain's dense percussive patterns come right to the fore on standouts like 'The Fall'. The barrage of blinding, glacial electronics and the wall of sound, fury and pain you hear when Danilova lets rip in her epic, dystopian style are just breathtaking. Elsewhere though, on downtempo numbers like the elegiac 'Desire', Dunn's deft production lets that extraordinary voice of hers soar high, mighty and free. **CG**

ANDY FOSBERRY

Celebrate The Life

3RD & DEBUT

"I wanted to make something positive," claims Hampshire beats maestro Andy Fosberry. "Music that looked forward to summer, or had nostalgia for warmer days." But while it may have a lighter touch than some of his more intense horror soundtracks, 'Celebrate The Life' isn't quite the full S Club 7.

The opening track, 'Your Tapestry', combines skittish beats with sinister ambient swirls, and even the hallucinogenic bleeps of 'The Sun Outside' suggest something nasty lurking in the trees behind the picnic site. You know those broken afternoon naps with the telly burbling away? It's a bit like those.

'It's All Only A Dream, Get Up' has layers of manipulated harmonies, descending softly into rhythmic, half-conscious breathing. 'Intentions' is the theme tune of the dedicated daytime dozer, all playful rhythms and whispered synth lines. And 'A Way Home' even adds gloriously incongruous guitar lines and a murmured vocal. "Is that how it is? / It's kind of rough / The deep stuff will find its own way home". All told, it's a splendidly warm-hearted album that gently stretches towards tantalising sunshine. **BF**

DAMIAN LAZARUS

(Music Inspired By The Film) Beijing Spring

SECRET TEACHINGS

This debut soundtrack by Damian Lazarus is a real departure from the veteran producer and DJ's usual dancefloor leanings. The first release on Secret Teachings, it's a resounding statement of intent from a label with a mission to champion exciting global music.

The album is inspired by acclaimed 2021 documentary 'Beijing Spring', which chronicles the struggle for free speech and artistic expression in the People's Republic of China in the late 1970s. Steeped in dense electronic ebb and flow, and featuring ancient Chinese instruments played by musicians tinkering around with the same tonal scale, this is a truly resonant and fascinating piece of work.

Meditative, haunting and beautifully poised, it just teems with sonic detail. Dulcimer and drone combine to utterly spellbinding effect on 'Spring', 'Oath' instantly locks you into its understated, fluid groove, and the vocal ululations on 'The Cleaner And The Tree' are something else. Music from the outer reaches, sent to soothe the soul – Lazarus has truly surpassed himself here. **VI**

700 BLISS

Nothing To Declare

HYPERDUB

Frenetic rewiring of hip hop and electronics

700 Bliss say they have 'Nothing To Declare', but I'm convinced their subsonic bass is weaponised enough to cause alarm bells at airport security. This first long-player from producer DJ Haram and musician/poet Moor Mother, two of the loudest voices in Philadelphia's DIY music scene, is a real wall-shaker. The duo's 2018 EP 'Spa 700' was a staccato punch of audio aggression. Spread across an album, there's no let-up in their furious frequencies.

On 'Totally Spies', guest vocalist Lafawndah's abraded vocals are aggravated by mile-deep bass. The jackhammer pounds of 'More Victories', this time accompanied by the broken vocals of speculative fiction writer M Téllez, has enough gravity to yank the International Space Station from orbit. Even on the beat-light 'Discipline', the spoken word seethes so antagonistically over a one-finger keyboard line, you feel Moor Mother is in a constant state of furious battle as she barks out couplets like "Who goes there? / Guerilla warfare".

The pair are quick to strike a self-deprecating hole in their own apocalyptic reverb. For example, the vocal drops often land in knockabout collages, bass-boosted for maximum hostility, or cartoonishly high, borderline 'Looney Tunes'. In one interlude, two chatty conversationalists rinse 700 Bliss, complaining that 'Spa 700' "wasn't very spa-like" before roasting Moor Mother's guttural delivery. Of course, I suspect the dissers are 700 Bliss themselves, and this friendly banter is an interesting contrast to the more serious intention here.

Peppered by bursts of broken electronics, 'Capitol' preaches about class war and the state of America in a full-blooded rap, akin to The Prodigy's 'Breathe' doused in battery acid. The pumping club track 'Anthology', its beat as delirious as any costumed Pet Shop Boys dance routine, pays tribute to the "matriarch of black dance", Katherine Dunham.

"She put it all out there, and they couldn't believe it," toasts Moor Mother, marking a clear inspiration for this album. It doesn't take an airport body scan to see 'Nothing To Declare' has layers. Just watch yourself. 700 Bliss are fronting for a scuffle, and if you're not careful, as growled halfway through the album, the "next one they write might be about you".

FAT ROLAND

Label Profile

Label: Dauw
Location: Ghent, Belgium
Est: 2014

Potted History: "The label was founded by visual artist Femke Strijbol and I," explains musician and Dauw co-founder Pieter Dudal. "We were living together at the time, and while working on a tape release of mine – and since the initial project was coming along very nicely – I jokingly said from the staircase that we should start a label. In the end, my tape never saw the light of day but the label was born. In hindsight, this became a life-changing decision and we couldn't be happier with how it's turned out so far."

Mission Statement: "There was definitely no big plan in the beginning," says Dudal. "We just created small-run tape releases with a strong focus on the visual part and the printing techniques behind it. We aimed to create pieces of art that are pleasing both to the ear and the eye. This is still an essential part of what we do, but we now increasingly put the musicians and their careers in a more central position. It's evolved from a boutique outlet for tapes, to a solid and ambitious label with a long-term focus on supporting a select group of musicians and their work."

Key Artists & Releases: "We were very happy with the release of r beny's 'Echo's Verse' album," says Dudal. "We were the first label to put out his music and this album really stands out to us. It was his debut vinyl release and the initial run sold out in a few days. We got nice press, and had the chance to book his first European tour. This was when we felt that we were doing more than just releasing art objects."

Future Plans: "There's a lot of new music in the pipeline from both returning and new artists," reveals Dudal. "Shortly before the pandemic took over, we were gradually making the switch to vinyl from the tape-only practice we had since we started. Since then, both prices and waiting times have increased a lot and have really put a strain on release schedules. We hope this situation will change soon, as we feel that changing to vinyl releases will be a big step up for the label – you can increase your audience directly, expand your distribution network, and so on. That being said, we're optimistic about the future and are looking forward to what it will bring for us."

Any Other Business? "My ultimate advice would be not to start a label!" laughs Dudal. "Sometimes you see people setting up an imprint only to close after several releases. I think most people really underestimate the amount of time and energy you have to devote to make it work. But if you want to start one, do it with passion. Try to find a balance between following your heart and making rational decisions. And most importantly, only surround yourself with people you feel comfortable with."

For more, see dauw.bandcamp.com

First And Last And Always

Erasers' **Rupert Thomas** on the first and last records he bought, and his go-to album

FIRST

SILVERCHAIR

Freak Show

MURMUR, 1997

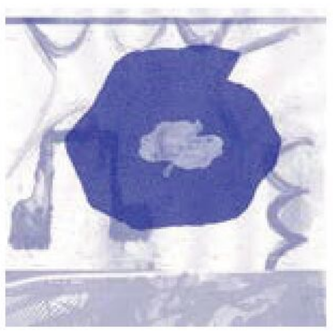
"I bought this on a family holiday to Bali, Indonesia when I was seven or eight years old. I have no idea why I happened to pick it up, and for a long time it was the only album in my collection. I wasn't really into music at this point, but this cassette definitely got a thrashing on the tape deck in my bedroom. Although this isn't music I still listen to, it was a pretty good first purchase!"

LAST

ANNA SAVAGE

Queens Rd / Saturn Again

ALTERED STATES TAPES, 2022



"I first heard these songs when my colleague Anna played them through the speakers at our workplace and it struck me immediately. Achingly beautiful, delicate, freak-folk compositions recorded straight into a phone speaker. Anna and I work at a small coffee roastery and have the same ethos about DIY recording, music and art, often sharing recommendations. Lovely sleeve design on this seven-inch record, out through the Newcastle, Australia label Altered States Tapes."

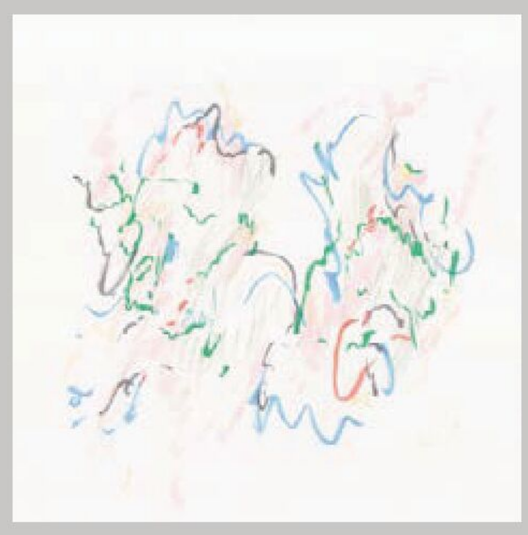
ALWAYS

LEE NOBLE

Ruiner

BATHETIC, 2013

"We bought this album a number of years ago and it definitely feels like the most listened-to record in our collection. A little different to Lee Noble's modular-based ambient compositions of recent years, 'Ruiner' strikes the perfect balance between structured songs and free-form atmospheres. Touching on psychedelic folk, kosmische and drone, it's incredibly immersive. This is one of those 'must listen in full' records that we've shared with housemates over breakfast, or late at night in the warmly lit living room."



ERASERS

Constant Connection

NIGHT SCHOOL

Shrouded yet hopeful electronics

Of all electronic music's myriad sub-genres, "dungeon synth" has to be the most problematic. Dark and brooding tones have been dominant in synthesiser compositions since the very beginning, and feeling the need to carve out a niche corner just for artists that aren't prone to offering up cheerful melodies seems, well, a bit much.

Whether you like the tag or not though, Erasers are leading lights of this subdued scene. Based in Perth, Australia, the duo of Rebecca Orchard and Rupert Thomas have always dealt in the fragile and sparse, almost as if they're reflecting their home city's remote geographical location. Perth might be their base, but their music suggests a Germanic quality – in Orchard's Nico-esque vocal, arresting yet detached, and sounds that evolve like a modular synth meet-up in a gloomy 1970s Cologne bierkeller.

Their third album 'Constant Connection' operates with a sense of maudlin fragility, but its low-lit presentation masks what can, at times, be a relatively hopeful set of songs. These tracks all, in some way, feature constantly murmuring drones which, when combined with Orchard's voice, leave you feeling uplifted in the same way that psychedelic music can nudge you out of a pedestrian frame of mind. Or, if you're of a more morose disposition, the scant framing of key tracks 'I Understand' and 'A Breeze' will leave you fairly downcast. Delicate, shimmering melodies abound on the extraordinary title track, but layers of descending tones act as an offset, leaving even the most joyous sounds subtly, and savagely, darkened.

Perhaps a less obvious reference point for the tracks here would be the more spartan pieces on Joy Division's posthumous 'Closer' and New Order's 'Movement'. 'Away From It All' is the best example of this, with its hollow, uncluttered percussion, a guitar riff weighted with ominous dread and a melodic bassline that Hooky would definitely approve of. Orchard offers one of her most yearning vocals too, singing of returning to either a real or metaphorical place. Whatever the reason, an escape into the minimalistic expanses of 'Constant Connection' is to experience electronic pop at its most delicate and thoughtful. The dungeon is optional.

MAT SMITH

IN THE NURSERY
Humberstone
ITN CORPORATION

Some families keep their entire histories in a single battered photo album, so kudos to Arthur Humberstone, a prolific home movie-maker, whose 1960s and 1970s films of twin sons Nigel and Klive form the bedrock of this affecting record. Over four decades, the Sheffield brothers have produced prodigious quantities of music, but perhaps none quite so personal as this.

No time for introspection, though. It's a big sound. Epic. Brassy horns, orchestral swells, pounding drums. The opener, 'Émigré (The Dressmaker)', is a rousing homage to the 19th century Humberstones who drowned sailing to a new life in New Zealand. 'Suvla Bay (The Cavalryman)' is a cello lament for a great uncle who served at Gallipoli. 'Mallards (The Storyteller)' combines lilting piano with hissy recordings of their late mother's bedtime stories, and 'Ektachrome (The Animator)' is a Floyd-like love letter to Arthur, whose accompanying video – comprising those glorious 8mm home movies – will melt the flintiest of hearts. Bold and beautiful, it's a family album of impressive ambition. **BF**

DAMO SUZUKI & SPIRITCZUALIC ENHANCEMENT CENTER
Arkaoda
AKUPHONE

As much as you don't want to make a big deal of Damo Suzuki's age – he's 72 – you can't help but feel in awe, given that 50 years after 'Ege Bamyası', he still pushes the freewheeling Spiritczualic Enhancement Center to the max.

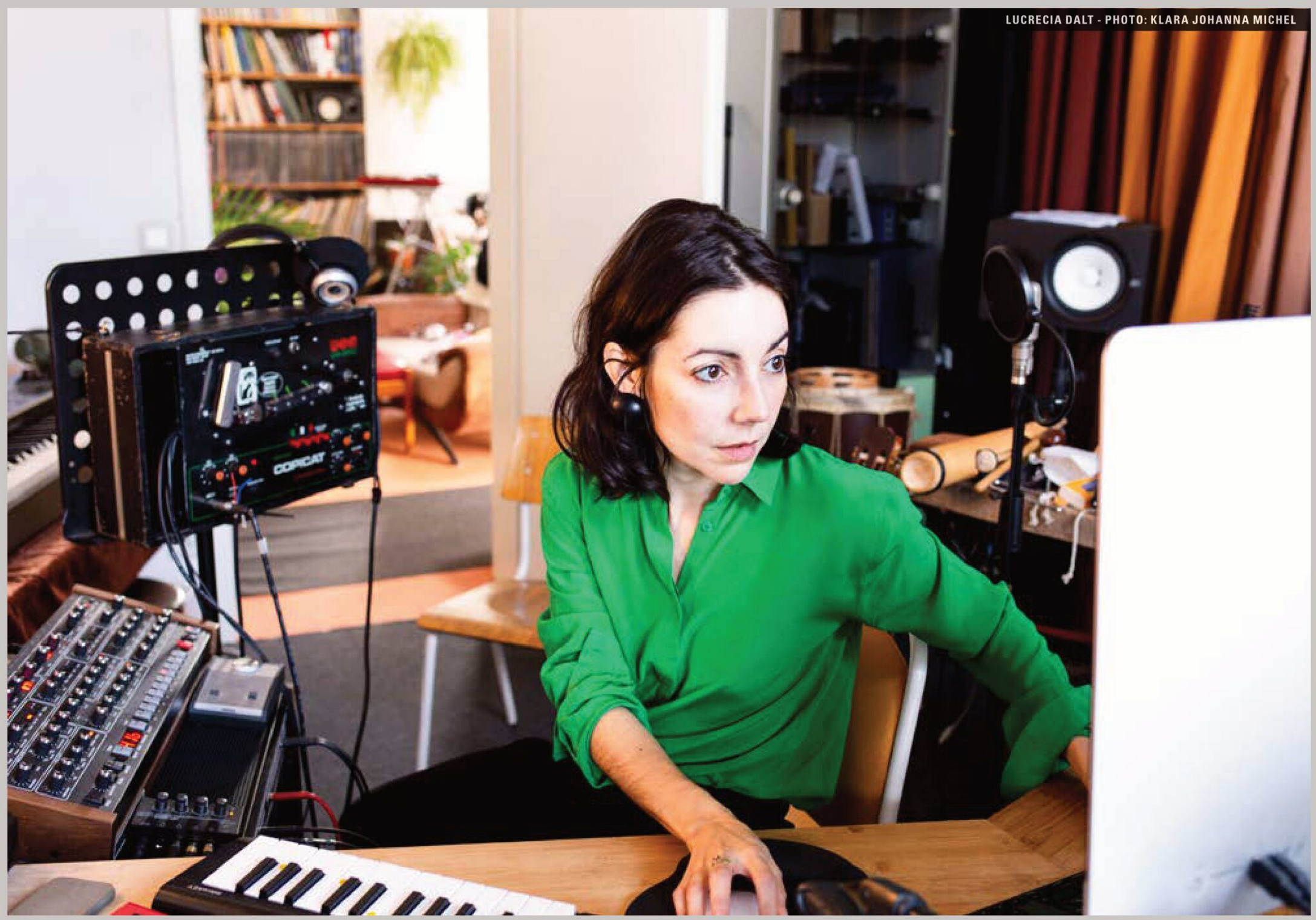
This is demonic kosmische at its very best. The opening track, 'U', is 20 minutes of undulating psychedelic storm, Suzuki's singular speaking-in-tongues vocals guiding the group's mercurial compositions and swirling crescendos. Sandwiched in the middle is the spectacular 'Ra', where drummer Nicolas Sheikholeslami builds a Jaki Liebezeit-style beat, thumping his tom-toms with glee while guitar wails through the whammy bars.

Saving the best (and most insane) for last, 'Beja' is a mind-warping jam which disintegrates halfway through like a plane breaking apart in mid-air. The rhythm syncopates, the synths start to scream, and we the passengers squeal with delight as Suzuki babbles on the radio before going mysteriously silent, allowing the band to make a crash landing. What a journey. **ILS**

C DUNCAN
Alluvium
BELLA UNION

To play C Duncan's 'Alluvium' is to escape to a world full of resplendent melodies and intricately-wrought electronica, safe from everyday horrors. His yearning vocals float above a glittering landscape of crystalline keyboards and burbling bass, journeying from nigh-on perfect pulsing synthpop ('I Tried') to a dreamy hymnal ('The Wedding Song'). Lead single, 'Heaven', is a gossamer-light confection that pulses with romantic joy. Simultaneously, it shimmers, slinks and seduces.

For this, his fourth album, C Duncan retreated back to a home recording studio set-up after the full-on orchestrations of 2019's 'Health'. Repeat listens reveal that his location, back by the water in Helensburgh, in his native Scotland, has had a clear influence. The sense of moving on, of ebb and flow, pervades the record, unifying an album of contrasts. It's everywhere from the whistled hook of 'Bell Toll' to the insistent drive of 'Pretending'. 'Alluvium' is ambitious in its scope, but intimate in its execution. Widescreen introspection at its very best. **AT**



LUCRECIA DALT - PHOTO: KLARA JOHANNA MICHEL

LUCRECIA DALT

The Seed (Original Score)

INVADA

Since emerging in 2005, Colombian musician and singer Lucrecia Dalt has become increasingly left-field with each release. A counterintuitive approach to garnering more attention, and yet here we are. 2018's 'Anticlines' and 2020's 'No Era Sólida' explored the spooky netherworld of electronic sound, while her 2021 collaboration 'Lucy & Aaron' with loop-centric Wolf Eyes alumnus Aaron Dilloway was anything but.

For her latest release, Dalt soundtracks Sam Walker's 2021 sci-fi horror flick 'The Seed', about three social media influencers who are gifted an ugly extraterrestrial by a passing meteor shower. She does a fine job describing and accompanying the narrative action on 'Blob Lands', while more figuratively titled tracks like 'Meat Carpet' and 'Liminal Ménage À Trois' are as tantalisingly offbeat as their titles.

Dalt has gone to great lengths to provide original music for 26 different scenes in all, and while the film has received mixed reviews, her score is far more likely to grow on you. **JA**

TEMPERS

New Meaning

DAIS

Tempers are New York duo Jasmine Golestaneh and Eddie Cooper, and 'New Meaning' is their third album of moody electronic pop. It's the sound of concrete under sodium light, a gothic disco in an abandoned subterranean shopping precinct.

Golestaneh's seductive voice is emptied of daylight, nocturnal to the core. The reverb it comes swathed in is like an internal conversation taking place, while the music is all 'Fade To Grey' synth vibes and chiming Cocteaus guitar. It's a complete package – somnambulant, mysterious and brilliantly executed.

'Nightwalking', the opening track, encapsulates their sound perfectly, while the brisk machine drumming and twinkling digital keys of 'Unfamiliar' is as upbeat as they get, like a ghostly a-ha. The stand-out track is the wonderfully melancholic 'Secrets And Lies', its looping melodies mirroring its protagonist's compulsive patterns of behaviour. There's a formula at work here, but it's a bloody good one. **JB**

KENNETH JAMES GIBSON

Groundskeeping

MEADOWS HEAVY RECORDERS

This veteran noise rocker's fourth album was recorded in a secluded cabin in the hippy hideout Idyllwild in the San Jacinto mountains. That impressive landscape lives in every moment here.

Mellow cellos, fuzzed via shortwave radio, seem to rise from deep valleys. Glaciers of frozen electronic frequencies navigate skrees of glorious classical ambience. The sporadic slide guitar on the elegiac 'David's Pass' conjures a western, caught in the wind.

Gibson's scuffed piano is back too, its naive melodies a highlight of 2018's 'In The Fields Of Nothing'. This time it stars on 'A Snowy Year In The Meadows Heavy', the title a tribute to Gibson's new label, Meadows Heavy Recorders. On this highlight track, the piano dallies with airy strings courtesy of Julie Carpenter, violinist for The Brian Jonestown Massacre, and the instruments intertwine into a memorably resolute climax. All with cabin-sized acoustics, literally. A hut in the hills has never sounded so good. **FR**

DUBSTAR

Two

NORTHERN WRITES

Swooning megapop from Britpop survivors

The arrival of an album from Dubstar, and one with the title 'Two' to boot, can understandably be expected to raise a forest of question marks. For starters, Sarah Blackwood and Chris Wilkie seem irrevocably welded to the Britpop era, what with sharing a label with Blur (Food) and playing their part in soundtracking the 1990s with the hit 'Stars' and its zeitgeist-riding mixture of mad-for-it dance beats and Cocteaus-style guitar swirling.

Even those who have followed the duo closely will know there have been times when it looked like the band might have disappeared altogether, although relations between the pair were still good enough for Wilkie to play guitar on Blackwood's live solo debut. All in all, while it might seem a little perverse to call your fifth album 'Two', you can see why they might wish to create a year zero with 2018's 'One' and stick to that plan.

Why are Dubstar still making music some 25 years on from their heyday? The proof is in the listening, and the briefest of encounters with 'Two' justifies its existence. A lot of that is surely down to the presence of Stephen Hague, producer to the Pet Shop Boys and New Order. Eminently qualified in the art of making beautiful, glamorous, middle-aged pop music, it takes the slightest flourish of piano and synthetic strings on the LP's opening song 'Token' to leave its indelible mark.

What Hague has done is brought out the best in the pair's songwriting, casting it in a timeless light. 'Tectonic Plates', with its Marr-esque guitar funkiness, and 'I Can See You Outside' could have been made any time between 1986 and 2022. There's a dash of St Etienne's effortlessness, a Pet Shop Boys-like bravery when it comes to heart-dropping chord changes, a bit of balls-out Italo house… and smiles all round, basically.

There are slower, more reflective moments like 'Lighthouse' and the stark, piano-led closer 'Perfect Circle' that ensure proceedings never get too formulaic, but even here Hague brings out a bold confidence that was never previously there, not even when he first worked with the band back in the 90s. 'Two'? Too good to miss, more like.

BEN WILLMOTT

CONRAD SCHNITZLER

Consequenz II/Con 84

BUREAU B

Welcome reanimation of overlooked classics

Few artists defied categorisation as joyfully as Conrad Schnitzler. While his peers sought earnest respect, he made sonic exploration look like fun. After quitting Tangerine Dream and Kluster in the early 1970s, he began a prodigious solo career. By the time of his death in 2011, he left us around 190 albums to sift through.

1986's "Consequenz II", made in collaboration with Wolfgang Seidel (aka Wolf Sequenza), is an easy album to love. From the get-go, it stimulates core kosmische pleasure centres and will generously accommodate fans of Cluster at their playful best. Side One's tracks were built around a drum machine that the duo had on loan for a week.

As opening title 'Von Hand' makes explicit, this is music played by humans, its synths swarming around martial handclaps and kick drum. Seidel's precise, real-time playing led Schnitzler to rechristen him Sequenza, which afforded flexibility, while maintaining structure. The instrument was returned to its owner before commencing Side Two, but it still marries in-the-moment improv to the discipline of Neue Deutsche Welle artists like DAF. In the deluge of Schnitzler's output, the immediate charm of 'Consequenz II' may have escaped notice. This wouldn't have troubled him, but hearing it afresh is cause for genuine jubilation.

'Con 84' possibly wrong-footed Schnitzler's fanbase in 1984 but it rewards re-examination now. There's a whiff of Wendy Carlos to these compositions – kind of freak-classical in an electronic toyshop – and a similar air of wide-eyed wonder permeates the music.

The machinery Schnitzler used is unknown to his chroniclers, although, as an avowed non-musician, it's doubtful he performed this crisp, baroque music in real time. The tracks are snappily short and titled with spacey numbers or dates. 'X18 (1+2)' briefly pirouettes like a music-box ballerina. The exception, '28.6.84 Blasen', exceeds seven minutes and miraculously overcomes the impediment of painfully 80s brass sounds. If you're fond of Open University theme tunes, you'll find this album a cornucopia of delight.

Schnitzler's unfettered approach to art production led him to make music that confounded even ardent admirers. These two vivacious records encourage further digging into his very diverse discography.

SCOTT BLIXEN

REVIEWS BY:
JEREMY ALLEN,
JOE BANKS,
SCOTT BLIXEN,
BOB FISCHER,
CLAIRE FRANCIS,
CARL GRIFFIN,
VELIMIR ILIC,
ISAAK LEWIS-SMITH,
PUSH,
FAT ROLAND,
MARK ROLAND,
JOE SILVA,
MAT SMITH,
ANTHONY THORNTON,
SPENSER TOMSON,
BEN WILLMOTT

BANGING ON

Our back page columnist says he has written his latest missive while hallucinating. Not that there's a whole lot of difference between this and his previous 88 columns...

WORDS & PICTURES: FAT ROLAND

I am ill. So very ill. I am after-birthed in a miasma of my greenest juices, girdled by a Great Barrier Reef of mucilaginous, man-sized Kleenex. I ache from buttock to brain to body parts that haven't been invented yet. If I sneeze at just three more knots on the Beaufort wind force scale, a lung is likely to eject through a nostril. Don't come near. You'll be chloroformed by a sauna of my own spectacular gases. The horror, the horror.

I'm writing this column on my sofa, horizontal and gasping, each word as painfully laid as a Rubik's Cube birthed by a chaffinch. I say "writing"… I'm dribbling on my computer keyboard as I grunt in indeterminate syllables in the hope of sending the smallest electrical impulse to my befuddled mind. I feel like I've not moved for months, like a fly-tipped mattress or disowned bicycle. Where do I end and where does my sofa begin? Is what I'm touching skin or upholstery? It's hard to tell – they're both so wet.

To inspire healing, my Bluetooth speaker is blasting out medical-themed electronic hits. Kraftwerk's 'Vitamin' tells me the A, B, C, D of the drugs I need. Praga Khan's 'Injected With A Poison' tells me I don't need those drugs anymore. The Prodigy's 'Take Me To The Hospital' tells me that, drugs or no drugs, Liam Howlett's going to lead-pipe my face to mush whatever happens. In the words of Depeche Mode's 'Shake The Disease', "You know how hard it is for me to shake the disease / Blah blah blah… something about tongues". Why do I never google these things before I start writing?

The two lads from the acclaimed bleep band Autechre are administering me paracetamol. One is dressed as Florence Nightingale, lamp and all. The other is dressed as Florence from 'The Magic Roundabout', a girl who thought she could converse with snails. This means only one thing. I'm hallucinating. The fever has taken my brain to another dimension. Pay close attention. I want to ask the Autechre chaps about the mystery behind their complex beats. But the pill they're ramming in my mouth has transformed into an animated beach ball from the video for 'Go West' by the Pet Shop Boys. "Mff mmfmffff mppph!" I protest into the inflatable plastic. "Have you heard our version of 'Single-Bilingual'?" asks Darren from Autechre, for he looks like a Darren.

Wait. No. This isn't real. It's just the illness. Is this what happens to all the great electronic musicians? They go mad with fever then produce masterpieces like 'Tubular Bells' or 'Violator' or 'The Best Of Vengaboys'? Should I be writing a symphony right now? If I don't deliver this column to Electronic Sound, it's the nipple clamp punishment, and none of us wants to go through that rash-inducing rigmarole. Again. I must try to get better. I make a gallon of Lemsip and shove my face into the hot sticky goo. I poke Vicks nasal sprays into every orifice I can find. I give myself a foot bath with Lucozade.

It's working. I'm feeling alright. I fling open my porch door and inhale the glorious outside air, ready to take on the world. I instantly vomit onto my patio. Ugh. I squint at the puke. The splatter seems to have formed letters. An I. Then an A and an M. Is that an I and two Ls? I gaze at the paving chunder through puffy eyes as sentences begin to form. "Tell you what," I say to Darren from Autechre, who's now dressed as Florence + The Machine, "sometimes this column just writes itself."

CHORD

Chord Electronics Ltd.

Mojo 2

TOWERING ABOVE

Mojo 2's unique digital architecture towers above ordinary chip-DACs. With uniquely powerful processing, the world's first 'UHD DSP', plus class-leading technical performance, Mojo 2 is a landmark product in the audio landscape.

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